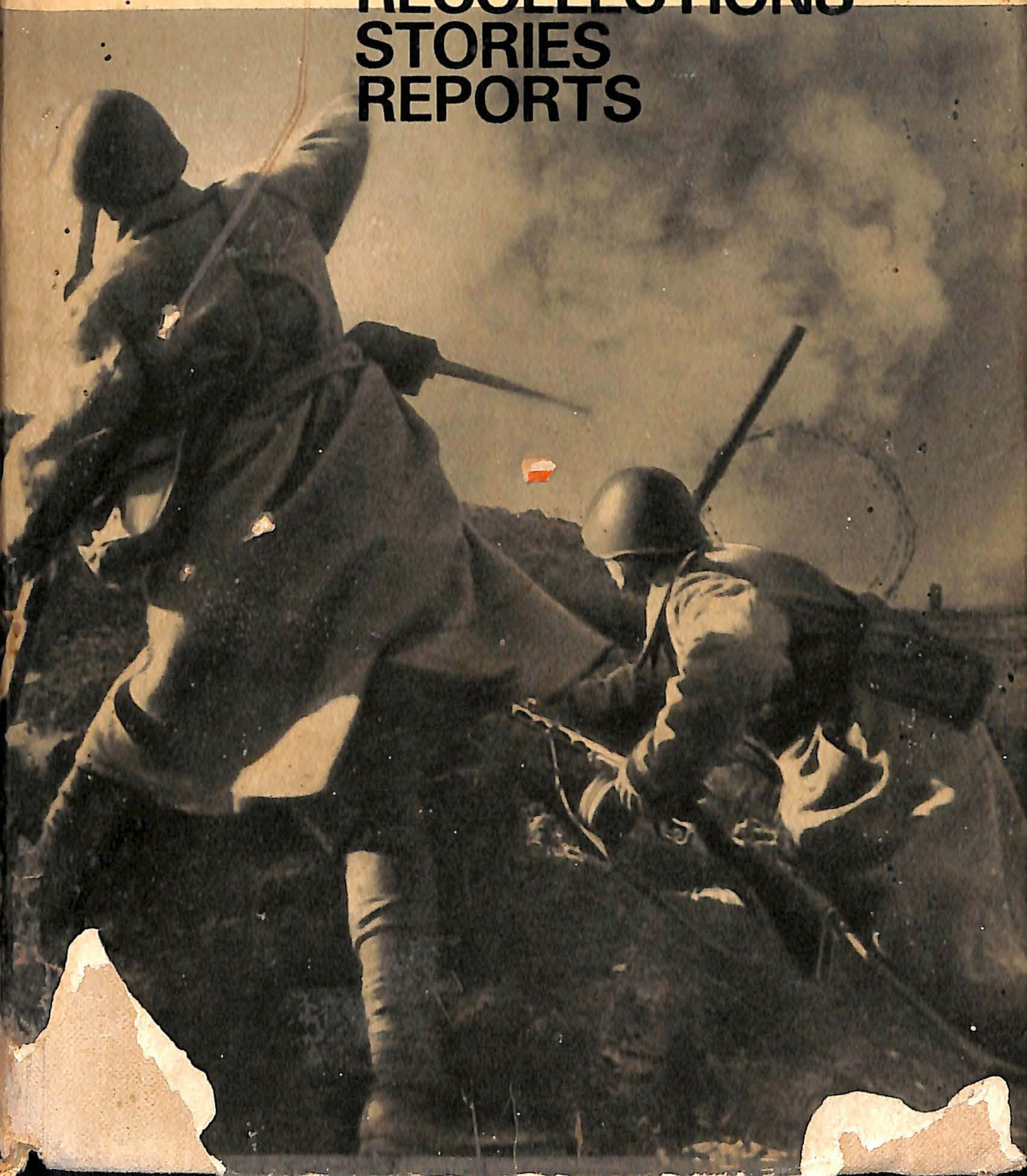
MOSCOW 1941
STALINGRAD 1942

RECOLLECTIONS
STORIES
REPORTS



In the winter of 1941, 78 choice nazi divisions, 1,700 tanks and over 1,000 planes were drawn up near Moscow to carry out Operation Typhoon. The Germans had come so close to Moscow that German could be heard on the radio on any wave length, and the very air was polluted by enemy breath. Leningrad, the second largest city in the Soviet Union, was besieged, and the noose of the enemy blockade had tightened round it. The Wehrmacht commanders were planning the capture of Stalingrad on the Volga, the country's main route for grain and oil supplies.

It was in those days and months, in the early period of the Great Patriotic War, that Hitler's army which was then at the zenith of its power suffered its first serious defeat. About half a million German soldiers and officers were killed in the battle for Moscow alone. The offensive launched by the Red Army in December 1941 recaptured enemy-occupied territory with a pre-war population of approximately 5,000,000. Leningrad held out, and soon the whole world was to hear of the heroic battle of Stalingrad.

This book tells about the battle for Moscow and other major events in the first period of the Great Patriotic War. The articles and stories are by Marshals Zhukov, Vassilevsky and Rokossovky, and by such well-known authors as Alexander Fadeyev, Konstantin Simonov, Vassily Grossman and Alexander Bek.



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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

It is twenty-five years since the glorious armies of the anti-hitlerite coalition brought the Second World War in Europe to its victorious conclusion The nazi generals signed their unconditional surrender in Berlin and the foul nazi aggression ended in utter defeat

But it was a hard-won victory And the aim of this book is to tell readers about the first and hardest stages of the Soviet Union s struggle 1941 1942 Moscow Leningrad Sevastopol Stalingrad The beginning of Hitler s end His army dizzy from easy victories in Europe came up against the courage and determination of Soviet soldiers, led by gifted commanders and armed with superior weapons designed by Soviet engineers

Today, the defeated generals of the Wehrmacht try to convince the public that they only needed one more battalion to win the battle for Moscow that the offensive against Stalingrad was a mistake, and that they were beaten by the Russian roads and the winter frosts

We have included in this volume the front line dispatches of well-known Soviet writers and the articles written by prominent Soviet generals about the first two, most

difficult years of war It was then that the Soviet people, undaunted by temporary reverses, defeats and losses, paved the way for final victory The enemy did not enter Moscow because its path from Brest was strewn with its own dead because nazi tanks flared like torches on the fields of Smolensk because the enemy rear was blazing with partisan activity

The glory of victory can only be fully appreciated if one knows of the trials that had to be overcome And this is what we have tried to present in this book

Alexander Vassilevsky

Marshal Alexander Mikhailovich Vassilevsky was born in 1895 in Ivanovo Region He joined the army as a private in the First World War and after the October Revolution successfully commanded various Red Army units Upon graduating from the General Staff Academy Vassilevsky carried out a number of important assignments entrusted to him by the Supreme Command During the last war he was Deputy Chief of Staff First Deputy Commissar for Defence and Commander of the 3rd Byelorus sian Front Later he was appointed C in C of the Soviet armies in the Far East which participated in routing Japan After the war Marshal Vassilevsky held the post of Defence Minister for a number of years He has since retired for reasons of health

THE TURNING POINT OF THE WAR

Among the major events of the Second World War the Battle of Moscow holds a special place It was precisely on the approaches to the capital of the world s first socialist state that Hitler s vaunted army, which for two years had marched practically unobstructed through many of the countries of Europe suffered its first serious defeat As was expressed in the Theses of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on The 50 years of the Great October Socialist Revolution the rout of the Germans near Moscow was the turning point of the war Hitler s *blitzkrieg* plan was buried forever and the myth of the invincibility of Hitler s army was exploded for the whole world to see

The historic victory of the Red Army near Moscow showed that there was a force capable not only of stopping, but also of routing the nazi aggressor and of delivering mankind from the threat of nazi enslavement The Battle of Moscow heralded the dawn of the Soviet people s military victory over nazism

The Battle of Moscow comprised a whole series of most diverse but in all cases extremely intense operations over a vast area and was fought uninterruptedly all through the autumn of 1941 and the winter of 1941-1942 More than 2 million people about 2 500 tanks 1 800 aircraft and some 25,000 guns and mortars were simultaneously employed in it

The Battle of Moscow falls into two phases–defensive and offensive

The defensive phase lasted two months–October and November As a result of the two months of heroic resistance of the Soviet troops in the Moscow direction the final all-out offensive of the German army was stemmed, and Hitler s plan to capture Moscow was thwarted Fighting in uncommonly difficult and at times criti-

cal conditions the Soviet troops had kept the enemy out of the city, pushed him back from the capital and inflicted a heavy defeat on him, thereby sharply reversing the course of the war

The counter-attack launched by the three Soviet fronts early in December 1941 marked the beginning of the offensive phase of the Battle of Moscow The Red Army smashed the striking forces of the enemy and hurled them back a long way to the west The immediate threat to Moscow and the Moscow industrial area was lifted The Red Army wrested the strategic initiative from the enemy, turning the tables

Before winning this historic victory our Armed Forces and the whole Soviet people experienced bitter defeats and military setbacks The Battle of Moscow had started when the military situation was still extremely unfavourable to us Only a little more than three months had elapsed since the Soviet Union had been forced to interrupt its peaceful socialist construction and had to exert every effort to repel the aggressors who had treacherously invaded our Country During that exceedingly hard and distressing time the USSR had to wage a lone struggle against the numerically superior and powerfully-armed forces of the fascist bloc The anti-nazi coalition was only just being formed The national liberation movement of the European peoples enslaved by the nazis had not yet assumed any appreciable scope There were, of course no hopes of a second front being opened in the near future Nazi Germany s rear was secure as never before The nazis could draw on entire military and economic potential of the European countries for their aggressive war aimed at winning world supremacy and, first and foremost, crushing the USSR–the working people s state

At the end of September 1941 we had not yet completed the conversion of industry to a wartime footing The loss of rich industrial and agricultural areas and the continuing evacuation of many industrial enterprises to the east made a rapid increase in the production of war materiel extraordinarily difficult and industry was unable to provide the army and navy with the necessary quantities of weapons and equipment

In the autumn of 1941 the Red Army was still in an extremely unfavourable strategic position The Soviet troops had to retreat to Leningrad abandoning Smolensk and Kiev Kharkov, the Donbas and the Crimea were threatened Despite their enormous losses, which from the beginning of the war right up to September 30, 1941, amounted to more than 550 000 men, the German troops were still driving eastwards They maintained the strategic initia-

tive, enjoyed superiority in men and weapons and had command of the air

A titanic struggle with its centre in the western strategic direction developed over a vast front stretching from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea Here, on the approaches to Moscow, both sides concentrated their main forces here the fate of the war was being decided

The military and political leadership of nazi Germany was well aware that as long as Moscow remained the inspiring and organising centre of the struggle against nazism the Soviet Union could not be defeated

That was why from the moment the nazi high command began preparing for war against the Soviet Union Moscow was a Number One target the hitlerites were intent on seizing at all costs They tried to achieve this aim all through the summer and autumn campaign of 1941 Nor did they relinquish it in 1942

And, if at the end of August 1941 the nazi command hastily diverted some of the striking forces of Army Group Centre to the south, this was not the result of a change in the views on the strategic and political importance of Moscow, which the hitlerites continued to consider the 'centre of Bolshevik resistance', Hitler was forced to act thus because of the unexpected situation that had developed at the front, which was far from favourable to the nazi command In July and the beginning of August, in the course of the Battle of Smolensk, the Red Army by its extremely staunch resistance and its courageous counter-attacks inflicted considerable losses on the troops of Army Group Centre, frustrating their first attempt to break through to Moscow and forcing them to assume the defensive At the same time the troops of the South-Western Front pinned down by their stubborn resistance the main forces of Army Group South and continued to threaten the right flank of the Army Group Centre which was delivering the main blow at the capital

The frustration of the attempts of the nazi troops to break through to Moscow in the summer of 1941 enabled the Soviet people to win precious time in order to organise more thoroughly the defence of the capital and fortify the approaches to it Under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party and the State Defence Committee, Party and military bodies made titanic efforts to build up the strength of our army and prepare powerful defences A great deal of work in preparing the defence of Moscow was done by the Moscow Party organisation

Moscow workers began to organise armed combat detachments and groups as early as the end of June 1941 The Central Commit-

tee of the Party supported this initiative of the Muscovites The Party organisation of the capital was assigned the task of organising in the shortest possible period strong units of the People s Volunteer Corps and destroyer battalions to assist the Red Army This task was successfully accomplished In the course of three days the selection committees of the capital and Moscow Region received applications from 310 000 volunteers (170 000 from the capital and 140,000 from Moscow Region) Naturally not all of them could be enlisted because the needs of Moscow s industrial enterprises in skilled labour had to be taken into consideration By July 8, 1941 twelve divisions of the People s Volunteer Corps were formed and sent to man the positions being organised in the rear of the troops on the Western Front

The measures of the State Defence Committee and the GHQ aimed at strengthening the capital s anti-aircraft defences and the extensive work of the Party organisations in preparing the population of Moscow for the struggle against the Luftwaffe proved very helpful in repelling air raids The well thought-out system of anti-aircraft defence as well as the fighting efficiency and heroism of the AA units saved Moscow from considerable destruction Of the 4 212 enemy aircraft that took part in the 36 raids on Moscow from the beginning of the war to the end of September 1941 only 120 reached the city, more than 200 German bombers having been shot down on the approaches to the capital

A great effort was made to build powerful defence lines on the approaches to the capital and to prepare the city itself for defence The efforts of the military command and the Moscow Party bodies both city and regional, were concentrated on the construction of the Vyazma Defence Line in the rear of the troops of the Western Front Tens of thousands of Muscovites worked heroically together with the people of Smolensk Region On July 16 the State Defence Committee decided to build the Mozhaisk Defence Line Here too between 85,000 and 100 000 Muscovites–three-quarters of them women–worked every day for a long period of time This labour exploit of the Muscovites earned the appreciation of the whole Soviet people

Having failed to take the Soviet capital by a *coup de main* the nazi command started systematic preparations for a new all-out offensive The new plan was part of the hitlerites general autumn offensive on the Eastern Front Its general aim was to rout the Red Army by decisive blows in all three strategic directions and to complete the offensive in the east before winter set in The main blow, as in the summer, was to be delivered in the Moscow direc-

tion, the offensives against Leningrad and Rostov-on-Don being continued at the same time

In the Moscow direction the nazi leadership planned to breach the Soviet defences with attacks by three powerful armoured groups from the areas of Dukhovshchina Roslavl and Shostka, encircle the main forces of the Western, Reserve and Bryansk Fronts in the Vyazma and Bryansk areas following this up with strong infantry assault on Moscow from the west and a pincer movement of armoured and motorised troops from the north and south During the preparations for this operation Hitler said at a conference in the HQ of Army Group Centre in the autumn of 1941 that in the course of that operation Moscow had to be surrounded so that not one Russian soldier nor a single inhabitant–man, woman or child–should be able to escape from it, and any attempt to do so should be suppressed by force

The order for this operation No 35 was signed by Hitler on September 6, 1941 To carry it out the German command concentrated its crack forces in the Moscow direction For this purpose Army Group Centre was reinforced by the 4th Panzer Group and two army corps They also brought back the 2nd Army and the 2nd Panzer Group from the south and sent large replacements and quantities of materiel The 8th Air Corps was also transferred there By the end of September the infantry divisions of Army Group Centre had been brought up to 15 000 effectives each

Against our three fronts–Western, Reserve and Bryansk–the enemy concentrated 77 divisions numbering 1 million men, 1 700 tanks and assault guns 19,500 guns and mortars and 950 planes

The rulers of the Third Reich gave this operation the code name Typhoon and did not in the least doubt that the large forces, the carefully elaborated plan of the general offensive against Moscow and the thorough preparation of the troops were a guarantee of complete and truly hurricane success In summing up all the preparations for that offensive on the Eastern Front Hitler said in his address to the troops on October 2 The way has at last been paved for crushing the enemy by a powerful blow before the onset of winter All of the preparations, as far as it was humanly possible, have been completed Today starts the last and decisive battle of this year

The Red Army and the whole Soviet people under the leadership of the Communist Party spared no efforts in repelling the enemy at the Soviet capital However, the enemy had a great superiority in the Moscow area in both manpower and equipment The GHQ lacked the trained strategic reserves to alter the balance

Everything possible was being done to create new defence zones and lines in the rear of the Western Front

The efforts of the Communist Party and the Soviet Command were directed not only at building up defences in depth on the approaches to Moscow and preparing a reliable air cover for the capital, but also at organising the formation and training of strategic reserves At that time, in addition to completing the formation of reserve armies assigned to the Reserve Front, new army units were being formed by order of the State Defence Committee in the Urals and Central Asia, in the Volga region and in the south of the country

In a word, paramount importance was attached to the organisation of strong defences in the Western direction Here the Soviet Command had concentrated the main forces of the Red Army However, the numerical and technical superiority of the enemy in this direction made the situation extremely grave

From September 30 to October 2 the hitlerites launched powerful attacks against the Soviet troops covering the Moscow direction All three of our fronts engaged the enemy in fierce, stubborn fighting The great Battle of Moscow had begun

Here is a brief outline of the major developments in the heroic Moscow epic Enjoying considerable superiority in the directions of his main effort the enemy managed to breach our defences On October 7 he succeeded in encircling the troops of the 16th, 19th, 20th, 24th and 32nd Armies of the Western and Reserve Fronts in the Vyazma area and in forcing the 22nd, 29th, and 21st Armies to retreat to the Ostashkov-Sychovka line The encircled Soviet troops continued to fight with extreme ferocity

By their stubborn and heroic resistance the Soviet troops encircled in the Vyazma area pinned down some 28 enemy divisions for a whole week This was of considerable strategic importance, enabling our command to take urgent measures to organise the defences on the Mozhaisk Line, where forces from the right flank of the Western Front, from other fronts and from the interior of the country were being swiftly concentrated For example, three infantry and two armoured divisions were transported to Moscow from the Far East The GHQ s decision to transfer troops from our Far-Eastern borders should be put down to the credit of Richard Sorge, a Soviet secret agent, who on September 14 reported to Moscow that the "Japanese government has decided not to take any action against the USSR"

Things also went extremely badly on the Bryansk Front As a result of the surprise attack of the enemy's 2nd Panzer Group into

the rear of our 13th Army on September 30, and the breach of the defences of our 50th Army by the enemy's 2nd Army with its subsequent penetration in the direction of Bryansk, into the rear of our 3rd Army, during the very first days of the nazi offensive the troops of the Bryansk Front had been virtually encircled Troop control was lost, the communications of the GHQ with the Front Command were temporarily broken and, having no clear idea of what was going on at the front, the GHQ had to assume command of some of the armies

On October 3 mechanised units of the 2nd Panzer Army, unopposed by Soviet troops, broke into Orel and crashed on along the Orel-Tula Highway The GHQ rushed in reserves, the 1st Guards Corps under General Lelyushenko, which checked the German advance beyond Mtsensk on the Tula road By October 6 the troops of the Bryansk Front found themselves split by the enemy into three groups and had to retreat under heavy blows

These unfavourable events put before the Party and the people an enormously important military and political task namely to hold Moscow at all costs by mobilising all the country's available forces and equipment In the first place it was vital to recover control of operations and organise a new group of forces capable of repelling the armoured hordes of the enemy

It was on solving these most complicated problems that the Central Committee of the Party, the State Defence Committee and the GHQ worked in those days

As early as the night of October 4, the State Defence Committee passed a special resolution on the defence of Moscow under those circumstances, choosing the Mozhaisk Defence Line as the main line of resistance and concentrating there all the available forces and equipment At the same time it was decided that the Party and the country should do their utmost to form large new strategic reserves in the interior of the country, arm them, train them as fast as possible and commit them to action

To ascertain the situation at the front west of Moscow, to help the commands of the Western and Reserve Fronts and to work out with them concrete, swift and efficient measures to defend the Soviet capital, the State Defence Committee had to send its representatives to these fronts, to the area of Gzhatsk and Mozhaisk The author of these lines, who at that time was Chief of the Operations Division and Deputy Chief of the General Staff, was sent there to represent the GHQ One of the objectives of these representatives was as quickly as possible to redeploy the troops of these fronts that were retreating, to the Mozhaisk Line and to

organise the defences on that line To assist me, the People s Commissariat of Defence gave me a group of General Staff officers and two columns of lorries Govorov, Major-General of the Artillery, was sent with a group of officers to the Mozhaisk Line to receive all the troops arriving from the front and the rear and to organise the defence

The representatives of the State Defence Committee and the GHQ arrived at the Western Front HQ the same day, October 5, and met with the Front Command During the five days spent on the Western Front they together with the Command and Staff of the Front managed to direct to the Mozhaisk Line close on five infantry divisions of the Western and Reserve Fronts retreating from the Rzhev, Sychovka and Vyazma directions The representatives of the State Defence Committee made daily telephone reports on the work done and the situation on the front to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief On the evening of October 9, during one of these telephone conversations, it was decided to merge the Western and Reserve Fronts into one Western Front, under the general command of General Zhukov By that time he had already been recalled from Leningrad to Moscow and on the GHQ s orders was on his way to join the troops defending Moscow

The representatives of the State Defence Committee returned to Moscow on October 10 The same day the GHQ drew up the official documents implementing the decision of the State Defence Committee on merging the troops of the Western and Reserve Fronts, liquidating the Reserve Front and the appointment of General Zhukov as Commander of the Western Front and General Konev as his Deputy Also the same day the State Defence Committee again considered matters concerning the defence of Moscow In order to fortify the immediate approaches to the capital it was decided that a third defence line–the Moscow Defence Zone–should be built just outside and inside the city limits The Commander and War Council of the Moscow Military Zone were charged with supervising the construction of the fortifications, organising the defences and controlling the troops of the Moscow Defence Zone

While continuing to build up the forces of the Western Front by reinforcing them with reserve troops from the rear on October 12 the GHQ also transferred to the front the troops deployed on the Mozhaisk Line

By October 13 the Western Front had the following troops the 29th, 30th and 31st Armies engaged in fierce fighting in the Kalinin



Blitzkrieg

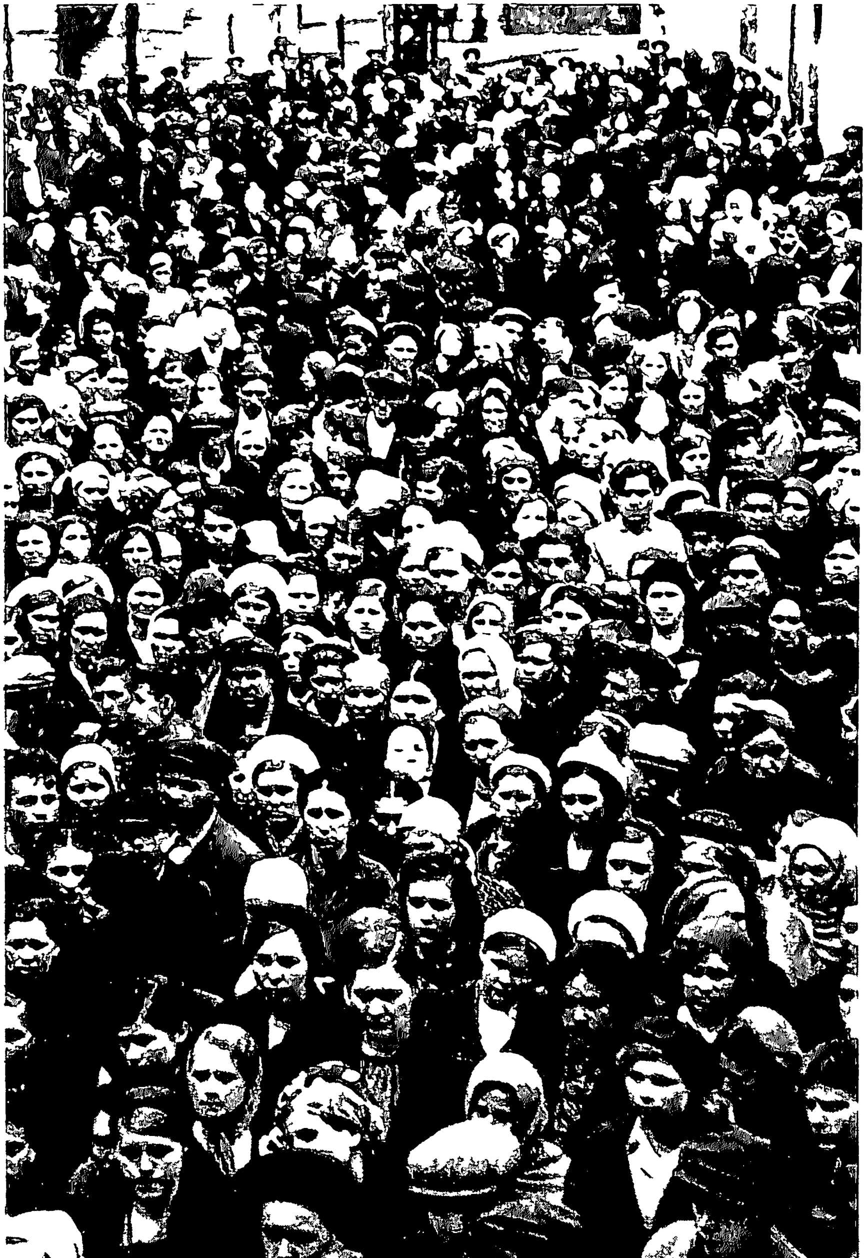


Blitzkrieg





Muscovites learn of German invasion.
June 22, 1941





Total war





Attack





Red Army reserves heading for front past sign Our cause is just The enemy will be crushed Victory will be ours







Citizens take up arms





They shall not pass!





They shall not pass!



Barricaded shop windows in Gorky Street in the heart of Moscow



Mayakovskaya Metro station serves as shelter during air-raid

direction the newly formed 16th Army under General Rokossovsky fighting a defensive battle in the Volokolamsk sector, the 5th Army formed from the troops of the Mozhaisk Sector fighting in the Mozhaisk direction (after General Lelyushenko had been wounded the army was under General Govorov of the Artillery), the 33rd Army under General Yefremov in the Naro-Fominsk direction the 43rd Army under General Golubev in the Maloyaroslavets direction and the 49th Army under General Zakharkin in the Kaluga direction

A particularly grave situation developed on the right flank of the Front, to the north-west of Moscow Resuming his offensive on October 14 the enemy captured Kalinin To halt the advance of the enemy in that direction the GHQ had organised a new front there—the Kalinin Front under the command of General Konev The Front was composed of the four armies of the right flank of the Western Front that were operating in this direction By their stubborn resistance the troops of the Kalinin Front checked the enemy advance and took up advantageous operational positions facing the enemy s northern striking group attacking in the direction of Mozhaisk

During the second half of October the nazis continued their effort to break through to Moscow Fierce battles raged on all the main approaches to the city The danger threatening our capital had immeasurably increased With the front approaching closer to Moscow the State Defence Committee decided to evacuate from the city and the Moscow area a number of government organisations, the entire diplomatic corps, the large war plants and the scientific and cultural institutions that had not already been evacuated Only the Politburo the State Defence Committee, the GHQ and a skeleton government and military apparatus needed to run the country and the Armed Forces remained in Moscow The General Staff with Marshal Shaposhnikov, its Chief, was also evacuated on October 16 Reliable communications were established with it I was ordered to head the small group left by the General Staff to direct operations for the GHQ

On October 19, since the situation at the front was becoming increasingly grave, the State Defence Committee decided to declare a state of siege in Moscow and the adjacent areas

After exceptionally heavy fighting at Vyazma a large part of our troops broke out of encirclement and joined the defenders of Moscow New detachments of the capital s working people also came to their aid The increased production of arms and equipment, the intensified construction of defence lines and the formation of fresh

People s Volunteer Corps units and communist and workers battalions all proved an invaluable contribution by the Muscovites to the defence of their city

Fighting with enormous tenacity and courage, by the end of October the Soviet troops succeeded in holding the enemy advance on the lines running along the Volga Reservoir (east of Volokolamsk), and the Nara and Oka Rivers to Alexin On the south-western approaches to the capital the German onslaught was checked just south of Tula by the heroic resistance of the 50th Army vigorously supported by detachments of Tula workers

It must be admitted that the October events caused us a great deal of distress The Red Army had suffered serious losses The enemy had advanced almost 150 miles, although failing to achieve the main aims of Operation Typhoon The staunchness and courage of the defenders of the Soviet capital had stopped the nazi hordes, and Army Group Centre was forced to discontinue its offensive This was the main outcome of the October phase of the Battle of Moscow

This was the most arduous period of the struggle to defend our capital against the numerically and technically superior enemy An important role in the way the Soviet troops held out and withstood the nazi onslaught was played by the firm leadership of the Central Committee of the Party and the State Defence Committee headed by Stalin

Speaking of those grim days for the capital and the whole country, when the enemy was at the very gates of Moscow and Leningrad, we are bound to mention the tremendous importance of the Eve-of-Revolution Day meeting of the Moscow City Soviet held on November 6 and of the traditional military parade in Red Square on November 7, the 24th Anniversary of the October Revolution The appeals of the Communist Party to spare no efforts in defending the Country and vanquishing the enemy, and the parade itself held almost before the very eyes of the enemy straining to break through to the capital caused a mighty upsurge of patriotism in the country, inspired the Soviet people to new heroic exploits on the front and in the rear imbued them with a firm confidence of an imminent change in the course of the war, and aroused scarlet fury in the enemy camp

The Soviet Command took advantage of the time it had gained reinforced the troops to the west of Moscow and strengthened the defence lines

One of the major achievements of the GHQ in those days was the mustering of new reserve units A new strategic echelon of our

Armed Forces was being formed on the Vytegra-Rybinsk-Gorky-Saratov-Stalingrad-Astrakhan line where by the decision of the State Defence Committee passed on October 5 nine reserve armies were being formed

Meantime the nazi command prepared its troops for resuming the offensive against Moscow During the first half of November the enemy formed two powerful shock groups which assumed the offensive on November 15-16 endeavouring to envelop Moscow in the north through Klin and Solnechnogorsk and in the south through Tula and Kashira The battle for Moscow flared up again

Our troops fought with unprecedented heroism Russia is vast, but there is nowhere to retreat for behind us is Moscow was the slogan of every defender of the capital Heavy defensive fighting on the approaches to Moscow continued all through the second half of November Towards the end of the month the enemy succeeded in advancing to the Moscow-Volga Canal north-west of the city crossing it at Yakhroma at the same time approaching Kashira south-east of the capital That was as far as the nazis could get Their offensive was brought to a complete standstill by powerful Red Army counter-attacks Their offensive capacity severely weakened bled white and exhausted by the stubborn resistance of the Soviet troops, the units of Army Group Centre discontinued their offensive on all sectors of the front early in December That was the end of the grim, defensive period of the Battle of Moscow

The collapse of the Moscow offensive marked the failure of the *blitzkrieg* plan as a whole The nazi army was forced to assume the defensive along the entire Soviet-German Front, and conditions were ripe for a Red Army counter-offensive Towards the beginning of December the balance of forces of the belligerent armies had changed Our army in the field had about 4 2 million effectives more than 32 000 guns and mortars, close to 2 000 tanks and nearly 3 700 aircraft At that time the nazi army together with its allies, had about 5 million men nearly 36 500 guns and mortars, almost 1,500 tanks and close to 2,500 aircraft These figures show that the enemy had retained superiority only in men and artillery

By the beginning of December the Soviet Supreme Command had assembled large strategic reserves–eight reserve armies numbering 58 infantry and cavalry divisions and seven brigades All these forces could be used by the GHQ to reinforce the army in the field, an extremely favourable factor if we consider that by that time the enemy reserves on the Soviet-German Front were greatly depleted

Nevertheless we were still in very dire straits. There was a danger of blockaded Leningrad being completely isolated from the mainland, the threat of an enemy breakthrough to the Caucasus from the Crimea, while Moscow still had nazi troops on her doorstep. Our people and our Armed Forces were faced with the problem of liquidating the threat to Leningrad, Moscow and the Caucasus, wresting the strategic initiative from the enemy and turning the tide of the war. The strategic plan envisaged the main efforts in the Western direction where a decisive counter-offensive of the Red Army was intended. Naturally, most of the GHQ reserves, newly formed reinforcements, material and equipment were being concentrated in that direction.

Thus at the end of November and the beginning of December the 1st Shock Army and the 20th Army arrived in the vicinity of Moscow, while the 10th, 26th and 61st Reserve Armies were being brought up. These armies were deployed on the flanks of the Western Front and at the point it joined the South-Western Front, some units taking part in the counter-attacks north of Moscow. Units also arrived on the Western Front from other reserve armies. The troops of the Kalinin Front were likewise being reinforced. Although the considerable reinforcement of the troops in the Western direction did not achieve absolute superiority over Army Group Centre, it was nevertheless one of the important factors in assuming the counter-offensive. At the beginning of December 1941, the enemy had 801,000 men (in his divisions and brigades), 14 000 guns and mortars, 1,000 tanks and more than 600 aircraft facing Moscow. The Red Army had about 720 000 men, close to 8 000 guns and mortars, 720 tanks and 1,170 aircraft.

The idea of a counter-offensive near Moscow originated in the GHQ in the beginning of November, immediately after the failure of the first enemy attempt to break through to the city when the task of forming large strategic reserves set before the Party and the country by the State Defence Committee was being successfully accomplished. The State Defence Committee and the GHQ were perfectly aware that only by active operations would it be possible to completely frustrate the nazi offensive against Moscow and thereby not only save the capital, but also radically change the course of the war.

At the end of November it was already obvious to the Soviet Command that the enemy's offensive was already grinding to a halt, that his flank striking groups had already lost their striking capacity to such an extent that at times they were unable to repel our counter-attacks. The State Defence Committee and the GHQ were so sure

of it that already in November the State Defence Committee decided to recall to Moscow not only several VIPs who had been evacuated from the capital in October but also several government organisations The General Staff with Shaposhnikov at its head also returned to Moscow and at once went to work organising the forthcoming counter-offensive

The Moscow counter-offensive was in large measure facilitated by the successful November and December offensive operations of the Soviet troops in the Tikhvin and Rostov directions These operations were necessitated by the critical situation in Leningrad and the danger of an enemy s breakthrough to the North Caucasus after the fall of Rostov The rout of the enemy groups near Tikhvin and Rostov although diverting part of the GHQ s reserve forces at that particularly crucial time, enabled us to pin down the enemy s forces in the north-western and southern directions and to deprive him of the chance of reinforcing his central group by transferring troops from these sectors

All the foregoing denoted that the conditions were ripening for a major counter-offensive in the main Moscow direction

According to the plan for this major counter-offensive the troops of the right and left flanks of the Western Front in co-operation with the Kalinin and South-Western Fronts were to rout the enemy striking groups in the north and south, and to drive them away from the capital

The GHQ had set December 5-6 as the general date for the offensive Actually the troops of the Kalinin Front launched the offensive on December 5, the troops of the Western Front north and south of Moscow started after heavy air raids and artillery preparation on December 6, and the main forces of the South-Western Front struck out on December 7-8

Large-scale fighting broke out on December 6 We were achieving greater successes with each passing day and the initiative was clearly passing into our hands The sudden blow delivered by our troops, especially north-west and south-west of Moscow, came as a complete surprise to the nazi command and troops thus confirming that the Soviet Command had been correct in its choice of the moment for launching the counter-offensive

The Supreme Command closely watched the situation and assigned additional tasks to the fronts as the troops advanced

The troops of the Kalinin Front liberated Kalinin as early as December 16 and on January 7 approached the Volga near Rzhev By December 25 the armies on the right flank of the Western Front had advanced about 60 miles to reach the line of the Lama and

Ruza Rivers South of Moscow the troops on the left flank of the Western Front had hurled the enemy back 80 miles by December 17 the armies on the right flank of the South-Western Front having simultaneously advanced 50-60 miles in the area of Yelets

The Bryansk Front was re-established on December 18 exploiting the success of the Western Front it pressed home the attack in the Orel direction and by the end of December advanced another 20-70 miles, reaching the Oka River

Continuing the offensive, in January 1942 the troops of the Western Front reached the Naro-Fominsk-Maloyaroslavets line west of Kaluga-Sukhinichi-Belev The counter-offensive was completed the first major Soviet offensive operation of strategic importance in the Great Patriotic War

The end of the Battle of Moscow was quite astonishing The Red Army had won a great military and political victory The hitherto invincible nazi armies had suffered their first major defeat in the Second World War

In its strategic offensive of December 1941 begun as a counter-offensive against the far-advanced enemy striking groups the Red Army hurled the Germans far back from Moscow (in some places up to 200 miles) thereby starting the liberation of the occupied territory of the Soviet Union

The nazi occupants were completely driven out of the Moscow and Tula provinces and large areas of neighbouring regions More than 11,000 villages and some 60 towns and a total area of 60 000 square miles with a pre-war population of nigh on 5 million were liberated by the Soviet troops during this winter offensive

The Red Army routed about 50 enemy divisions According to the Chief of the German General Staff, their ground forces had lost during that period (September 30 1941-February 28 1942) almost half a million men To make up for these losses the nazi command had sent some 800,000 men to the Soviet-German Front between December 1941 and April 1942 transferring 39 divisions and 6 brigades from the west It follows that the nazis managed to save their troops from catastrophe only by weakening their forces in Western Europe where there were no combat operations in progress

The offensive of the main and best forces of the German Wehrmacht against Moscow had completely failed Together with it collapsed the notorious Plan Barbarossa which embodied Hitler s hopes for a lightning war The Moscow victory was the turning point of the war The total and final failure of the *blitzkrieg* against the USSR compelled the nazi leadership to face the necessity of

waging a long protracted war with all the problems that entailed The great victory of the Soviet people had a tremendous strategic, moral and political impact

The victory boosted the anti-nazi struggle and the Resistance movement in the German-occupied countries The heroic defence of Moscow strengthened the conviction of European patriots that the hour of liberation was not far off The fact that Moscow had endured the severe trial with honour and had not only withstood the enemy onslaught, but had actually inflicted on Hitler s armies their first serious defeat of the war, was hailed throughout the world as a victory of the progressive forces over nazism According to the eloquent expression of W Z Foster, one of the prominent leaders of the international working-class movement the Red Army s Moscow counter-offensive marked a transition to the great popular offensive against nazism

The defeat of the German Wehrmacht near Moscow broke the spirit and impaired the fighting efficiency of the nazi troops leading to outbreaks of panic and a deterioration of discipline Sharp differences in the evaluation of the causes of the Moscow defeat as well as in the questions of how the war against the Soviet Union should be waged further developed among the ruling clique Hitler tried to put the blame for the defeat and the general deterioration of the fighting efficiency of the troops on his generals Thirty-five generals were dismissed from their posts in the winter of 1941-1942 General Field-Marshal von Brauchitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht was dismissed A similar fate overtook General Field-Marshal von Bock, the Commander of Army Group Centre, as well as Generals Guderian Hoepner and Strauss, the commanders of the 2nd and 4th Panzer Armies and the 9th Field Army respectively

The former nazi generals are now trying their best to find objective reasons for the collapse of their Moscow plans They blame Hitler for having failed to heed their wise advice and for his fatal delay in launching the attack on Moscow Mellenthin, Manstein, Rendulic Buttlar and many other generals and West-German military writers are trying their best to save the honour of the German generals Other nazi generals like Hoth Guderian and Tippelskirch are also trying to prove that the main reason for the German defeat at Moscow was–of course in addition to Hitler s mistakes–the severe Russian winter The same ' winter theory was suggested by Winston Churchill However he too, had to admit that the invincible German troops were driven from Moscow not by the winter, but by the Red Army Churchill was not the only one to

make this admission Until the rout of the nazi troops at Moscow many U S and British statesmen and military leaders did not believe that the Soviet Union could hold out in a war against nazi Germany The Moscow victory showed the whole world that the Soviet Union could crush the aggressor This played an invaluable role in strengthening the anti-nazi coalition Heroic Moscow became the recognised centre of international politics Moscow became the place where important meetings and conferences with our war allies were subsequently held and the military efforts of the members of the anti-nazi coalition co-ordinated

The major victory won by the Soviet Armed Forces at Moscow and its enormous influence on the course of the war has had to be admitted even by Hitler s generals who participated in the struggle on the approaches to the Soviet capital Thus General Tippelskirch admits that "the outcome of this winter campaign had a disastrous effect on subsequent operations General Guderian writes The offensive against Moscow had failed We had suffered a serious defeat ' General Buttlar emphasises that since the offensive against Moscow failed and the contemplated aim in the decisive direction was not achieved ' the days of the greatest trials started for the Germans ' Very significant is the testimony of General Blumentritt who observed that "the campaign in Russia and particularly the turning point before Moscow, marked the first great German reversal, both in the political and in the military fields ' British and American historians of the Second World War were also forced to admit the importance of this defeat of the nazi army Major-General Fuller, for example, observes that after the defeat in the winter of 1941-1942 the German army "never recovered the vigour it lost and, in the eyes of the world, it was no longer the invincible army

The Moscow victory attested that the Soviet Union, at that time waging war against nazi Germany all alone, made an enormous contribution to the struggle against the nazi aggressor

The rout of the hitlerites at Moscow aggravated the contradictions within the nazi bloc and frustrated the plans of the nazi command to involve Japan and Turkey in the war against the Soviet Union The victory of the Red Army at Moscow was a decisive factor in keeping these countries from aggression against the USSR The attempts of nazi Germany to spread its influence to Iran and use its territory as a springboard against the Soviet Union were also curbed

The relations between nazi Germany and her satellites greatly deteriorated Faced with the necessity of waging a protracted war,

the nazi command was very much in need of reinforcing its troops weakened by the defeat and therefore demanded that Hungary, Rumania, Italy and the other vassal countries should send new troop units to the theatre of war and increase the deliveries of raw materials and foodstuffs to Germany. Of course, this placed a heavy burden on Hitler's allies who had already suffered great losses that had considerably undermined their economies. Hence the growing discontent with the war and passive resistance to the nazi dictates. The relations between Finland and Germany had also become strained. No amount of pressure and propaganda of the Finnish government could repress the population's discontent caused by the ordeals of the war, the big losses and increasing German demands on the country's economy.

Although nazi Germany had managed to somewhat improve its shaken position by mobilising its internal resources, plundering the occupied countries and bringing pressure to bear on its allies, after their defeat at Moscow her armies were forced to assume the defensive for the whole winter and spring and could no longer simultaneously advance along the entire Soviet-German Front.

In speaking of the factors that ensured the Moscow victory, mention must first of all be made of the mass heroism of the Soviet fighting men, the invincible patriotism of the Soviet people. Thirty-six thousand officers and men were decorated with orders and medals. Not only individuals but even whole units had distinguished themselves in the fighting. For exemplary fulfilment of combat duties and display of valour 14 divisions, 3 cavalry corps, 2 infantry and 5 tank brigades, 9 artillery and 6 air regiments and a number of other special units were awarded the honorary title of Guards. The title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded to 110 fighting men, including the 28 men of General Panfilov's 8th Guards Infantry Division who had particularly distinguished themselves. More than 1 million people were decorated with the "For the Defence of Moscow" Medal.

The Moscow victory attested the increased combat skills of the Red Army and its commanders, and brilliant direction. The military leaders who won the Battle of Moscow included Generals Zhukov, Konev, Timoshenko, Rokossovsky, Govorov, Boldin, Golubev, Yefremov, Zakharkin, Kuznetsov, Golikov, Kreizer, Lelyushenko and Popov, outstanding officers of Front and Army staffs Sokolovsky, Zakharov, Kazakov, Bodin, Zakharov, Golushkevich, Sandalov, Psurtsev, and division and corps commanders Panfilov, Polosukhin, Lizyukov, Paegle, Belov, Dovator, Beloborodov, Katukov, Pliyev, Petrov, Rotmistrov, Chanchibadze and many, many

others Extensive organisational and educational work among the personnel was done by the War Councils of the Fronts and Armies Party organisations and political instructors in the units It should be emphasised that the leading role in the fighting was played by Communists who with their intrepidity, organisation and staunchness cemented the troops

As for military skill during the Battle of Moscow the role played by the Soviet Command s expedient utilisation of the strategic reserves cannot be overrated Despite the distressing and at times critical situation during the defence of Moscow the GHQ displayed great fortitude and will-power by withholding the strategic reserves brought up to Moscow for a decisive counter-offensive aimed at routing the numerically superior enemy The experience of the Battle of Moscow in utilising the GHQ reserves is very instructive

During the heavy defensive fighting the counter-offensive and the general offensive an important contribution was made by the partisans in the Moscow Tula Smolensk and Kalinin provinces and Byelorussia By their raids on enemy communication and supply lines, HQs and garrisons they continually harassed the enemy and hindered his combat operations Partisan detachments often advanced together with regular Red Army units The Lazo Partisan regiment the Polar Bear Detachment the Zhabo Detachment, etc maintained radio contact with the staff of the Western Front and fulfilled its assignments Outstanding deeds of heroism were performed during the Battle of Moscow by Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya Liza Chaikina Viktor Karasyov Konstantin Zaslonov and many, many others Many partisans were awarded the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union for their courage and noble service to their country

For the outstanding services of the working people of the capital, for their courage and heroism in the struggle against the enemy Moscow was decorated on September 6 1947 with the Order of Lenin and on the 20th anniversary of the victory over nazi Germany was awarded the title of Hero city

The Muscovites had performed their duty to their country not only by fighting the enemy in the battlefields but also by their heroic and selfless labour The working people of the capital had transformed the city into a vast arsenal which during the Battle of Moscow and later supplied the front with submachine guns, mortars machine guns, shells and a good deal of other materiel

The author of these lines greatly treasures the diploma together with which he was presented the millionth submachine gun by the Moscow motor workers on September 27 1943 The following are

a few lines from this diploma By orders of the Party the collective of the Moscow Order of Lenin Motor Works began manufacture of the 1941 submachine-gun model during the grim days of October 1941 The honourable and important task set by the Party before the Works collective–to supply the Red Army with as many submachine guns as possible–has been accomplished By overfulfilling the assignments of the State Defence Committee month in and month out the collective has produced, by September 27, 1943 one million submachine-guns Producing the one-millionth submachine-gun the collective of the Works decided to present you Comrade Vassilevsky, with the one-millionth gun

We remember well the arduous days when the engineers, technicians and workers of Moscow exerted inhuman efforts to fulfill the plan for the fourth quarter worked out by the Central Committee and the Government, aimed at putting Moscow s industry on a war footing Despite all the hardships and the gravity of the military situation this plan was overfulfilled The women and young people made a worthy contribution to the defence of Moscow and the rout of the enemy at the walls of the heroic city

The great victory in the Battle of Moscow once more confirmed the following words of Lenin In any war victory is in the final analysis conditioned by the morale of the masses who shed their blood on the battlefields The conviction that the war is just and that it is necessary to lay down their lives for the good of their brethren infuses courage in the soldiers and enables them to endure unprecedented hardships

We recall with respect and pride all who took part in the Battle of Moscow and bow our heads in memory of those who gave their lives for the freedom and independence of our country

The staunchness and fighting spirit of the defenders of Moscow–the Soviet Armed Forces and the working people of the capital–were among the most important factors that ensured this historic victory

The great victory at the gates of Moscow was made possible by the titanic strength and inflexible will of our Communist Party which directed the efforts of the front and rear of the whole Soviet people, towards routing the enemy hordes that had invaded the sacred soil of our Motherland

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V I Lenin *Collected Works* Vol 41 p 121 5th Russ ed

Georgi Zhukov

Marshal Georgi Konstantinovich Zhukov was born in 1896 in Kaluga Region His father was a peasant He began his military career in the Red Army in 1918 and came to the fore as a brilliant general during the Great Patriotic War when he was Chief of the General Staff Deputy Commissar for Defence C in C of the Leningrad Western and 1st Ukrainian Fronts and in the last period of the war commanded the armies of the First Byelorussian Front which took part in the assault on Berlin in May 1945 Marshal Zhukov was empowered by the Soviet Supreme Command to accept the capitulation of the German Army in Berlin

After the war Marshal Zhukov was commander of various military districts and later was Minister of Defence retiring in October 1957 He has been a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union since 1919 and is the only officer to have received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union four times

THE BATTLE OF MOSCOW

On October 5, 1941, a call came from the GHQ to say that Comrade Stalin wished to speak with the Front Commander

I got through to the GHQ from the headquarters of the Leningrad Front and said Zhukov speaking

I was asked to wait a moment, and before two minutes were up the GHQ operator said

You re through to Comrade Stalin now

After the customary greetings, our conversation ran as follows

Stalin

Could you take a plane and fly over to Moscow? In view of the deteriorated situation on the left flank of the Reserve Front in the Yukhnov area the GHQ would like to consult you on the measures that should be taken Appoint a deputy, perhaps Khozin

Zhukov

With your permission I shall leave early morning on the 6th

Stalin

Very well We shall expect you in Moscow tomorrow afternoon

However, due to certain complications in the sector of the 54th Army commanded by Marshal Kulik, I was unable to leave on the morning of the 6th, and with the permission of the Supreme C-in-C postponed my departure till the following day

On the evening of the 6th Stalin telephoned again

What s the situation? What are the enemy s intentions? he asked

German pressure has slackened, I reported Prisoners say that their forces suffered extremely heavy casualties in the September fighting and are assuming the defensive on the outskirts of Leningrad The enemy is now heavily shelling and bombing the

city Air reconnaissance have detected large enemy motorised and armoured columns moving southwards from Leningrad They are apparently transferring them to the Moscow direction

After reporting on the situation in Kulik s army I asked the Supreme C-in-C if the order to fly to Moscow still held

"Appoint the Chief of Staff General Khozin or Fedyuninsky as your deputy Stalin repeated, and fly over to Moscow

Taking leave of the Leningrad Front War Council–Zhdanov Kuznetsov, Shtykov, Kapustin and Solovyov–with whom I had worked in such exceptional harmony during the critical days of the defence of Leningrad, I flew to Moscow General Khozin had to be sent immediately to General Kulik s army and Fedyuninsky assumed temporary command of the Front

I arrived in Moscow on the 7th and was met by Stalin s security chief He informed me that Stalin had a touch of flu and was working at home We went straight there

Stalin nodded in reply to my greeting and called me over to the map

Look at this, he said 'The situation here is extremely grave I just can t manage to get a full report from the Western Front what s going on there How can we make a decision without knowing the strength of the enemy the direction of his offensive, and the situation in our troops Thoroughly investigate the situation at the headquarters of the Western Front, and telephone me whatever the time I shall be waiting "

I went straight to General Shaposhnikov, the Chief of Staff

'The C-in-C has just rung, he said He ordered us to prepare a map of the Western Front for you It'll be arriving any minute now The Western Front HQ is now where the Reserve Front HQ was in August, when you conducted the operation to recapture the Yelnya salient

He poured me out some strong tea and said he was desperately tired Indeed he did look very bad On receiving the map I set off directly for the headquarters of the Western Front

On the way there I sat with a torch trained on the map, studying the situation at the Front I was drowsy and had to stop the car from time to time and take a short run in the fresh air

It was night by the time I arrived The duty officer informed me that all the senior staff officers were in conference with the Commander Going in I found the room in semi-darkness lit only by candles Generals Konev, Sokolovsky, Bulganin and Malandin were seated at the table. They all looked thoroughly worn out I explained the reason for my arrival

What Malandin, Chief of the Operations Division was able to tell me about the latest developments somewhat supplemented and clarified the information I had already gleaned

At the beginning of the German offensive on Moscow we had three Fronts defending the distant approaches to the capital the Western Front commanded by General Konev the Reserve Front under Marshal Budyonny and the Bryansk Front commanded by General Yeremenko Their total strength at the end of September was some 800 000 effectives, 782 tanks, 6,808 guns and mortars and 545 aircraft The Western Front disposed of the largest forces in both numbers and equipment

For his offensive against Moscow, the enemy had concentrated forces greatly exceeding those of our three Fronts taken together The Germans had a superiority of 1 25 1 in infantry, of 2 2 1 in tanks of 2 1 1 in guns and mortars and 1 7 1 in aircraft

The German offensive began on September 30 with an attack by Guderian s Panzers and the 2nd Army on the Bryansk Front in the Zhukovka-Shostka sector On October 2 the enemy struck powerful blows against the Western and Reserve Fronts There followed particularly strong attacks from the areas to the north of Dukhovshchina and to the east of Roslavl The enemy succeeded in breaching our lines, and his shock forces crashed forward encircling the troops of the Western and Reserve Fronts in the Vyazma area

The situation was particularly grave to the south of Bryansk, where the 3rd and 13th Armies of the Bryansk Front were outflanked and threatened with encirclement Guderian s forces met little resistance and rushed on to Orel We had insufficient forces in the area to stem their advance and Orel fell on October 3rd The Bryansk Front had been cut in half and the troops were falling back eastwards suffering heavy losses

An alarming situation had also developed in the Tula direction

On orders from the Commander of the Western Front, General Konev, a strong counter-thrust was launched against the enemy forces outflanking to the north Unfortunately the attack was unsuccessful and by October 6, a large part of the forces of the Western and Reserve Fronts had been encircled to the west of Vyazma

My conversation at the Western Front HQ and an analysis of the situation left me with the impression that the disaster in the Vyazma area might well have been averted Despite the enemy s superiority in manpower and equipment our forces could have avoided encirclement if only the direction of the enemy s main

thrusts had been determined in time and the necessary forces mustered from quiet sectors of the front to counter them This had not been done, and our defences had been too weak to withstand such concentrated attacks Large gaps had formed and there had been nothing to fill them with, since the Staff had no reserves on hand

At 2 30 a m on October 8th, I telephoned Stalin He was still working After reporting on the situation I went on to say

"The main danger now lies in the weakness of the Mozhaisk Line There's no guaranteeing that the enemy armoured units won't suddenly make a dash on Moscow We must quickly transfer troops from wherever we can to the Mozhaisk Defence Line

Where are the 19th and 20th Armies and General Boldin's group now Where are the 24th and 32nd Armies of the Reserve Front? Stalin asked

"They're encircled to the west and south-west of Vyazma I replied

Your intentions?'

'I'm going straight off to find Budyonny

'Any idea where Budyonny's headquarters are?

Somewhere near Maloyaroslavets, I suppose'

Alright, after you've seen Budyonny telephone me immediately'

It was drizzling, a thick mist drifted along the ground and visibility was practically nil As we were approaching the small station of Obninskoye (sixty-five miles from Moscow) we caught sight of two signals men laying a telephone line across the river Protva

Where are you laying that line, Comrades? I asked

'Where we were ordered to, that's where, one of the soldiers a man of giant build replied without paying us the slightest attention

We told them who we were and said that we were looking for the Reserve Front HQ and Marshal Budyonny

The soldier braced up and replied

Beg your pardon, Comrade General We didn't recognise you You've already passed the Front HQ It was transferred here two hours ago and is now in those cottages in the wood up there on the hill The guards will show you where to go

We turned back and before long I was in the room of First Rank Commissar Mekhlis, the GHQ representative There too was the Front Chief of Staff, General Anisov Mekhlis was talking over the phone, giving someone a really good dressing down

To my inquiry as to where the Commander was, the Chief of Staff answered

It s anybody s guess Yesterday afternoon he was with the 43rd Army I m worried something may have happened to Budyonny

Have you done anything about finding him?

Yes we sent out liaison officers but they haven t returned yet

Then Mekhlis asked me

And what s the reason for your visit?

I ve come as a member of the GHQ on orders from the C-in-C to investigate the situation. I replied

Well you can see what a fix we ve got into, Mekhlis said I m at present trying to muster men retreating in disorder We ll be rearming them and forming them into new units at the assembly points

From my conversation with Mekhlis and Anisov I learned nothing new either about the position of the Reserve Front or about the enemy I returned to the car and drove off towards Yukhnov, hoping to find out what was going on more quickly on the spot

As we drove near the Protva I was assailed by all sorts of childhood memories I knew the area like the back of my hand, for I had roamed all over it in my early years Only six miles from Obninskoye station where the Reserve Front HQ was situated lay the village of Strelkovka where I was born My mother and my sister with her four children were there now I wondered how they were and was tempted to call in and see But there was no time What would happen to them if the nazis came here How would the Germans treat my near ones if they found out that they were related to General Zhukov? They would no doubt shoot them I must seize the first available opportunity to have them sent to me in Moscow

Two weeks later Strelkovka was occupied by the Germans along with the rest of the Ugodsky Zavod area But the local population did not take it lying down A large partisan unit was formed in the district, commanded by that fearless patriot and wise organiser Viktor Karasvov, a member of the Komsomol, with the secretary of the Ugodsky Zavod Party committee, Alexander Kurbatov, as Commissar That fearless partisan, Mikhail Guryanov, secretary of the district executive committee also served in the unit

The Ugodsky Zavod partisan unit carried out bold raids on HQs, isolated German troop units and installations in the enemy rear In one such night raid they destroyed an important Wehrmacht Corps headquarters

In November 1941 Mikhail Guryanov was captured by the

Germans, brutally beaten up and hung. To this day the people of our district still lovingly tend the hero's grave.

Later, when they were retreating, the Germans set fire to Strelkovka and many other villages and my mother's home was burnt down. Luckily, I had managed to get her out in time. The Ugodsky Zavod district was liberated by General Seleznyov's 17th Infantry Division and other units of the 49th Army.

After the war, on the site of the village of Pyatkino (burned down by the Germans when they retreated) where in 1941 the Headquarters of the Reserve Front and then of the Western Front were located, the town of Obninsk grew up, to become famous round the globe when the world's first atomic power station was built there. Today Obninsk is an important scientific research centre.

We drove right through Maloyaroslavets to the centre without meeting a living soul. The town appeared to have been abandoned. But we did see two cars parked outside the district executive committee.

"Whose cars are these?" I asked waking up the driver of one of them.

"Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny's, Comrade General."

"And where is Semyon Mikhailovich?"

"In the executive committee."

"Have you been here long?"

"About three hours."

Going in, I found Budyonny poring over a map. We greeted each other warmly. From his haggard face it was immediately clear how much he had gone through in those hectic days.

"Where have you sprung from?" Budyonny asked.

"I've come from Konev's."

"And how is he getting on? Haven't been able to get in touch with him for two days now. Yesterday I was at the 43rd Army headquarters and the Front HQ was moved in my absence. I don't know where it is now."

"I found it 65 miles from Moscow, in the woods to the left of the road, beyond the railway bridge over the Protva. They're waiting for you there. I'm sorry to say, a large part of the forces of the Western Front has been encircled."

"We're no better off ourselves," Budyonny said. "The 24th and 32nd Armies have got cut off. I almost fell into the enemy's clutches myself yesterday, between Yukhnov and Vyazma. Large motorised and armoured columns were advancing towards Vyazma, apparently to envelop the town to the east."

In whose hands is Yukhnov? I asked

I really don t know There were close to two infantry regiments on the river Ugra, but without artillery support I expect it s in enemy s hands

"I see And who s defending the Yukhnov-Maloyaroslavets road?

On my way here I met nobody in Medyn apart from three militiamen The local officials had left

Go to Front headquarters, I said, find out what the situation is and inform the GHQ I ll go to the Yukhnov area Report to the C-in-C about our meeting, and say that I ve gone to Kaluga We must find out what's going on there

Arriving in Medyn I found that there was indeed nobody there Only an old woman poking about in the ruins of a bombed house

What are you looking for? I asked

She looked up and stared blankly at me, with wide, vacant eyes

What s the matter? I asked

But she said nothing and went back to her rummaging Another woman appeared from somewhere beyond the ruins and came towards me carrying a half-filled bag

No good asking her anything She s gone insane with grief We had a German air-raid the day before yesterday They dropped bombs and fired from their planes She lived here in this house with her grandchildren She was drawing water from the well when they came over, and before her very eyes a bomb fell on her house, and the children were killed Our house was destroyed too We ve got to get away quick But I thought I d take a look in the ruins—might find some clothes and shoes worth taking

Tears were coursing down her cheeks

I set off towards Yukhnov with heavy heart Every now and then we had to slow down and take a careful look around to make sure we didn t run into the enemy

About 7 miles down the road we were suddenly stopped by some armed soldiers in tank helmets in the woods One of them came up to the car

Can t go any further, he said And who might you be?

I told him and asked where their unit was

'Our armoured brigade headquarters is here in the woods, about a hundred yards away

"Excellent Take me there

I was very pleased indeed to have found the tank brigade there A neat little tankman rose to meet me I was sure I had seen him somewhere before

'Colonel Troitsky Commander of the GHQ reserve armoured brigade, he reported

"Troitsky! Well, well, well! I must say I never expected to meet you here!

I remembered Troitsky from 1939 at Khalkhin-Gol in Mongolia where he had been Chief of Staff of the 11th Armoured Brigade The brigade had terrorised the Japanese

"I never imagined I d meet you here either Comrade General said Troitsky "I'd heard you were in command of the Leningrad Front I didn t know you d returned

Well now, tell me what s going on here First of all where s the enemy?"

"The enemy has already taken Yukhnov, Colonel Troitsky began "Their advance units have captured the bridge over the Ugra I sent scouts to Kaluga The enemy hasn t reached there yet but there's fierce fighting going on in the area The 5th Infantry Division and several retreating units of the 43rd Army are fighting there My brigade belongs to the GHQ reserves This is the second day we've been here, and I've received no orders whatsoever"

"Send a liaison officer to Reserve Front headquarters near Obninskoye station across the Protva, and inform Marshal Budyonny of the situation Deploy part of the brigade to defend the approaches to Medyn While you're at HQ inform the General Staff of the orders you ve received from me and tell them I ve left for Kaluga to visit the 5th Infantry Division

I later learned that before the enemy had taken the bridge over the Ugra it had been blown up by a detachment under Major Starchak, commander of the Western Front paratroops

This unit composed of 400 men, had been formed on October 4 on his personal initiative and was made up of frontier guards being trained for operations in the enemy rear

After blowing up the bridge, Starchak s unit had taken up defensive positions along the river Ugra and were shortly after reinforced by a detachment of cadets from the Podolsk military training colleges commanded by Senior Lieutenant Mamchik and Captain Rossikov

The heroic resistance of these detachments prevented the enemy from forcing the Ugra and breaking through to Medyn

After five days of fierce uninterrupted fighting they had been practically wiped out to a man, but by their heroic sacrifice they had foiled the enemy plan for a lightning advance on Maloyaroslavets, thereby enabling our troops to gain precious time for organising defences on the approaches to Moscow

In the vicinity of Kaluga area a liaison officer brought me a cable from the Chief of the General Staff, ordering me to report to the HQ of the Western Front on October 10.

A commission of the State Defence Committee was working there at the time.

Shortly after my arrival at the HQ, in Krasnovidovo, I was called to the telephone. Stalin was on the line.

"The GHQ has decided to appoint you C-in-C of the Western Front. Konev will stay on as your deputy. Any objections?"

"Of course not. I think Konev should be placed in command of the Kalinin sector, which is too far away and needs auxiliary control."

"All right," Stalin agreed. "You will also have at your disposal the surviving units of the Reserve Front and those on the Mozhaisk Defence Line. Take them all in hand as quickly as possible and go to it."

"I shall do as you order, but I would ask you to bring up larger reserves immediately, for we can expect the Germans to intensify their attacks on Moscow at any moment."

After discussing the situation, Konev and I decided for a start to transfer headquarters to Alabino. Konev was to take the necessary means of control and a group of officers and go to co-ordinate operations on the Kalinin sector, while the Front War Council was to go to Mozhaisk and see Colonel Bogdanov, commander of the Mozhaisk fortified area, in order to ascertain the situation there.

The HQ was transferred to Alabino, and within two hours Bulganin, representing the War Council, and myself were in Mozhaisk. Artillery fire and bomb explosions were distinctly audible there. Bogdanov reported that the 32nd Infantry Division supported by artillery and tanks were engaging the enemy forward motorised and armoured units on the approaches to Borodino.

After giving Bogdanov the necessary orders we left for the Front HQ.

The headquarters immediately set to work organising and planning operations. There was a great deal to be done, and not a moment to lose.

We had to organise strong defences on the Volokolamsk-Mozhaisk-Maloyaroslavets-Kaluga line, prepare the defence in depth, and create second echelons and front reserves, for manoeuvring to reinforce threatened sectors. We had to organise ground and air reconnaissance and reliable troop control, and take steps to improve the delivery of field supplies. Most important of all, we had to undertake large-scale political work, to raise the troops'

morale, strengthen their faith in their own strength and convince them that the enemy was going to be routed on the approaches to Moscow.

Intense work proceeded day and night. People were literally dropping with exhaustion from lack of sleep, but moved by a strong sense of personal responsibility for the fate of Moscow and of their Country, following the dictates of the Party, they worked like Trojans among the soldiers to ensure adamantine defence on the approaches to Moscow.

In the summer and autumn of 1941, the Party Central Committee, the State Defence Committee and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief took various important measures to strengthen the defence of the capital, muster large reserves, and reinforce the army in the field with new units and equipment. Now additional measures were taken to ensure that the enemy advance was halted.

The transference of the GHQ reserves and forces from the neighbouring fronts to the Mozhaisk Defence Line had begun on the night of October 7. These reinforcements included fourteen infantry divisions, sixteen armoured brigades, over forty artillery regiments and many other units. The 16th, 5th, 43rd and 49th Armies were reformed, and numbered 90,000 effectives by the middle of October. Of course these forces were clearly insufficient to organise continuous reliable defences, but the GHQ had no more reserves it could dispose of, and the reinforcements on their way from the Far East and other distant regions were held up for various reasons. We therefore decided to concentrate first and foremost on those sectors where enemy attacks were most likely to come: in the Volokolamsk, Mozhaisk, Maloyaroslavets and Kaluga areas. It was also here that we concentrated our main artillery and anti-tank units.

We sent the staff and command of the 16th Army under Rokossovsky, Lobachov and Malinin to the Volokolamsk sector. The 16th Army had been reinforced with new units, since the divisions which had been transferred to it from the 20th Army had been encircled to the west of Vyazma. The 5th Army under General Lelyushenko (replaced after he was wounded by General Govorov) was concentrated in the Mozhaisk sector, the 43rd Army under General Golubev in the Maloyaroslavets sector, and the 49th Army under General Zakharkin in the Kaluga sector.

We knew all these commanders to be fine, experienced leaders and had absolute faith in them. We knew they and the troops under them would do their utmost to prevent an enemy breakthrough to Moscow.

I ought to mention at this point the efficient work of the Front staff under General Sokolovsky, General Malandin, Chief of the Operations Division, and the energetic efforts of General Psurtsev, the Signals Chief, to ensure stable communications with the troops.

Large defence works were undertaken in the rear of the first echelon of the Western Front, and anti-tank zones were built in all areas most likely to be threatened by armoured strikes. Reserves were brought up to the key sectors.

Our HQ was shortly transferred to Perkhushkovo, where telegraph and telephone wires were laid to all army and air force units and a line was established with the GHQ.

Thus, the Western Front, entrusted with the historic mission of defending Moscow, had practically speaking been created anew.

The Party under the leadership of the Central Committee conducted large-scale propaganda work, explaining the grave situation and the terrible danger threatening Moscow. The Central Committee appealed to the Soviet people to honourably perform their duty to their country and prevent the enemy from reaching Moscow.

Our troops encircled to the west of Vyazma were still fighting heroically in an attempt to break through to rejoin our main forces: but without success. The Front Command and the GHQ helped the encircled units by bombing German troop concentrations and dropping food supplies and ammunition. Neither the Front nor the GHQ were able to do any more at the time.

By continuing to fight bravely the encircled troops tied down the main enemy forces, preventing the Germans from developing their offensive on Moscow.

Twice—on October 10 and again on the 12th—we radioed the command post of the encircled troops brief information about the enemy and proposals for a breakthrough under General Lukin, commander of the 19th Army. We asked them to inform us immediately of their plan for a breakthrough and the disposition of their forces, stating in what sector we should organise air support. However we received no reply to either of our calls: presumably they arrived too late. It looked very much as if general control had been lost, and the troops were only able to break out of encirclement in small groups.

This is what Andrei Stuchenko, then in command of the 45th Cavalry Division, told me later:

"In breaking out of encirclement to rejoin our troops with the remnants of our divisions, we destroyed the nazis wherever we could, and in all killed several thousand. In the middle of October,

not a day went by without ferocious clashes with the enemy We lost many remarkably fine soldiers, officers and political instructors in these battles

He spoke with emotion of the death of the division s Commissar, Polekhin, who despite the fact that it was particularly dangerous for him, himself took charge of reconnaissance

'Although most of the division had already been killed the survivers fought on with only one fervent aim to join the main forces of the Front as quickly as possible and fight alongside them to defend Moscow And it was a great day for us when we finally broke out of encirclement to rejoin the Front and help repulse the advancing enemy

Thanks to the stubborn resistance of the troops encircled in the Vyazma area, we gained precious time for organising our defences on the Mozhaisk Line Their sacrifice was not in vain The story of their heroic resistance that made such a great contribution to the common cause the defence of Moscow, has yet to be told

On October 13 fierce fighting broke out on all the key sectors of the front before Moscow These were anxious days

The Party Central Committee and the State Defence Committee decided to immediately evacuate to Kuibyshev a large number of government and Party organisations and the entire diplomatic corps of Moscow Much other valuable state property was to be moved as well

The enemy intensified their bombing of the city, and the air-raid sirens howled almost every night However, by this time the Party had already done a great deal to strengthen the city s anti-aircraft defences In accordance with the government and State Defence Committee decisions of July millions of people had learnt air-raid precautions, and the Muscovites were no longer afraid of incendiaries

The Supreme Command had concentrated large fighter fighter-bomber and bomber groups in the Moscow area, formed in the autumn and placed under its direct control

On October 20 the State Defence Committee proclaimed a state of siege in Moscow and the Moscow area The strictest discipline was introduced in all the units defending the city Every serious breach of law and order was to be dealt with promptly The Muscovites gave a firm rebuff to the enemy s accomplices–the panic-mongers

The Soviet capital showed great courage in the face of the approaching danger The passionate appeals of the Central Committee and the Moscow Party Committee to defend the Soviet

capital and rout the enemy at its gates went straight to the hearts of every Muscovite every soldier, and the whole Soviet people and met with a tremendous response The Muscovites turned their city and its immediate approaches into an impregnable fortress In case the enemy should break into the city the citizens formed hundreds of armed workers detachments combat units and tank destroyer units About 100 000 Muscovites did military training without abandoning their regular jobs During the Battle of Moscow they joined regular army units at the front The many-sided activities of the Communists of Moscow and the Moscow region rallying the workers to defend the capital from the fierce foe, was a heroic epic achievement

Twelve voluntary *opolchenıye* divisions had been formed on the initiative of the Muscovites in the first months of the war The military organs and Party organisations continued to receive thousands of applications from people volunteering for the front

The *opolchenıye* divisions were joined by people from all walks of life–workers, engineers, teachers and intellectuals They were naturally often far from being fully trained They were pretty raw when they went to the front and had to learn what they could once they got there

But they all had something in common–and that was their tremendous patriotism their unflinching courage and determination and their implicit faith in victory And it is surely hardly surprising, therefore that some of the volunteer units formed by Party organisations in many cities should have fought magnificently once they had acquired experience in battle

The *opolchentsy* formed the nucleus of many special reconnaissance and ski units and fought behind the enemy lines as partisans Hundreds of thousands of Muscovites worked round the clock building defence lines round the capital

In those grave October days the war council of the Western Front issued an appeal to the troops It contained the following

Comrades! At this grave hour when the very existence of our state is in danger the life of every soldier belongs to his Country Our Country demands from every one of us the greatest effort of strength courage, heroism and staunchness Our Country calls on us to put up an indestructible wall and block the path of the fascist hordes to our beloved Moscow Now as never before we must have vigilance, iron discipline, organisation and determined action, unbending will to victory and readiness for self-sacrifice

Decisive events were at hand

The Volokolamsk-Mozhaisk-Maloyaroslavets-Serpukhov line was

still weakly manned and had already been breached by the enemy in places, and the Front war council decided, in order to prevent a major breakthrough to Moscow, to prepare for an all-out stand on the Novo-Zavidovsky-Klin-the Istra reservoir-Istra-Krasnaya Pakhra-Serpukhov-Alexin line.

On October 17, in view of the difficulty of directing the troops operating in the Kalinin sector owing to the length of our line, the GHQ complied with the War Council's request and ordered the 22nd, 29th, 30th and 31st Armies to be detached from the Western Front to form a new Kalinin Front under General Konev. Corps Commissar Leonov was appointed to the war council of the new Front, and General Ivanov became Chief of Staff. The formation of the Kalinin Front shortened the defence line of the Western Front, making troop control much easier.

The Bryansk Front, commanded by General Yeremenko, was in a desperate plight. Most of the troops had been encircled and were stubbornly fighting their way eastwards, but were finding the going extremely hard and making very little headway. Nevertheless, their heroic efforts were finally crowned with success, and on October 23 they broke out of encirclement. Pursuing the remnants of the Bryansk Front, Guderian's forward units reached Tula on October 29.

Up to November 10, 1941, Tula came within the defence sector of the Bryansk Front. After capturing Orel, the enemy bore down on Tula. At the time there were no forces capable of defending the town, apart from a few rear units of the 50th Army then being formed. In the second half of October three greatly depleted infantry divisions were withdrawing in the area. They numbered between five hundred and one thousand five hundred effectives each, and the artillery regiment had only four guns left. The men were completely exhausted.

The inhabitants of Tula did a magnificent job helping our troops, sewing them new uniforms and repairing their arms and equipment in express time. Under the guidance of the Party organisations they worked round the clock to prepare the troops for battle.

At record speed the town defence committee under Vassily Zhavoronkov, secretary of the Party regional committee, organised and armed workers' battalions, which fought bravely together with units of the 50th Army on the immediate approaches to the town, preventing it from falling to the enemy.

The workers' regiment under Captain Gorshkov and Commissar Ageyev especially distinguished themselves in the fighting in the area of Kosaya Gora along with regular army units. General

Popov in command of the Tula sector threw in an anti-aircraft regiment against the German tanks The units of the Tula sector fought with outstanding valour

The attack of Guderian s panzer units on October 30 was beaten back suffering heavy losses by the defenders of the Tula sector Guderian s plans to take Tula by a *coup de main* (in the same way as he had captured Orel) and approach Moscow from the south, outflanking our main defence lines, failed

On November 10 by decision of the GHQ the Western Front was charged with the defence of Tula (in place of the Bryansk Front which was dissolved), thereby considerably lengthening the Front s defence line

All the enemy s repeated attempts to capture Tula in November and open the way to Moscow from the south failed The town held out Tula completely tied down the whole right flank of the German forces Finally the enemy decided to by-pass the town, but this involved stretching their lines As a result Guderian s army lost its tactical advantage–compact striking power Tula and its inhabitants played an outstanding role in the defeat of the German forces near Moscow

It is unnecessary to describe the whole course of military operations here since this has already been done in detail in numerous accounts The result of the October defensive battles near Moscow also needs no advertising In short, after a month of ferocious costly battles the nazi armies had managed to advance a total of about 150 miles yet the plan of the nazi High Command to take Moscow in the middle of October had been foiled the enemy forces were seriously weakened by fatigue, and the lines of their shock forces had been stretched

The German offensive was petering out, and by the end of October came to a halt on a front running Turginovo-Volokolamsk-Dorokhovo-Naro-Fominsk, west of Serpukhov, to Alexin At the same time the Kalinin Front in the north had become stabilised

In the Volokolamsk sector the troops firmly resisted the onslaught first of the enemy 5th Army Corps, then of two motorised corps Units of the newly formed 16th Army fought with remarkable stubbornness General Panfilov s Infantry Division, later reformed as the 8th Guards Division, particularly distinguished themselves in the fighting A cadet regiment commanded by Colonel Mladentsev supported by three anti-tank artillery regiments also fought with great heroism

The enemy 40th Motorised Corps supported by large groups of tanks and aircraft attacking in the Mozhaisk direction, met with the

stubborn resistance of Colonel Polosukhin s 32nd Infantry Division Almost a hundred and thirty years after Napoleon s Russian campaign, this division was destined to meet the enemy on the field of Borodino–the battlefield that has become our national pride an eternal memorial to the glory of Russian arms The men of the 32nd Infantry Division proved worthy of their noble ancestors and added to that glory

Units of the enemy s 12th Army and 57th Motorised Corps advancing on Maloyaroslavets met with heroic resistance by units of Colonel Naumov s 312th Infantry Division and cadets of the Podolsk infantry and artillery training colleges The tankmen of Colonel Troitsky's division, whom I have already mentioned stood their ground to the death in the Medyn area The soldiers and officers of the 110th Infantry Division and the 151st Motorised Infantry Brigade brought glory to their colours near the old Russian town of Borovsk, staunchly resisting the enemy onslaught shoulder to shoulder with the men of the 127th Armoured Battalion At the price of heavy casualties, the enemy gradually pressed our units back to the river Protva, then to the Nara but failed to advance further

In speaking of the great heroism that was shown we intend not only the valour of our troops commanders and political instructors for what was achieved at the front in October and in the subsequent battles was only made possible by the united efforts of the Soviet Armed Forces, the Communists and the workers of the capital and the Moscow region, supported by the whole Soviet people

In those anxious days the GHQ reinforced the Western Front with the 33rd Army under General Yefremov which took up defensive positions in the Naro-Fominsk area, in the gap between the 5th and 43rd Armies The 43rd Army was to hold the eastern bank of the Nara river to the south of Naro-Fominsk, and the 49th Army–a line running to the west of Serpukhov and to the east of Tarusa and Alexin

The troops fortified their positions on this line and were prepared to fight the enemy tooth and nail The troops of the Western Front had learned a lot in the three weeks of the October fighting The political instructors had carried on vast education work among the men, aimed at making known on a wide scale the methods that had proved most effective in combat, and encouraging individual and collective heroism

I would particularly like to mention the tremendous organising work of the head of the political department of the Western Front,

Division Commissar Lestev, a fine Communist and extremely brave soldier When he was killed in November 1941 his post was taken over by Makarov to whom much credit is also due for promoting the political work among the troops

On November 1, I was summoned to the GHQ

In addition to the meeting to mark the anniversary of the October Revolution we also want to hold a military parade in Moscow, Stalin said Do you think the situation at the front makes these celebrations possible?

The enemy won t launch an all-out offensive for the next few days I replied, for they have suffered heavy casualties in the recent fighting and are busy reinforcing and regrouping their troops I suggest that to counter the Luftwaffe which will most certainly be active, we strengthen our anti-aircraft defences by bringing up fighters to Moscow from adjacent fronts '

On Revolution Day eve a meeting to celebrate the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution was held in the underground hall of the Mayakovskaya Metro station The next day, November 7, the traditional military parade was held on Red Square, from which the troops marched straight off to the front

The fact that the parade was held played an enormous role in strengthening the morale of the troops and the whole Soviet people, and was an event of great international significance In his speech Stalin reiterated the confidence of the Party and the government in the inevitable defeat of the enemy

Meanwhile, anti-tank defences in depth, anti-tank zones and strong-points were being organised on threatened sectors of the front On orders from the State Defence Committee and the GHQ, units were being reinforced with men, arms, ammunition, signals equipment, and engineering, material and technical equipment which the country had rushed to the defenders of Moscow

The GHQ assigned additional infantry and armoured units formed in the East of the country to the Western Front, and these were concentrated in the sectors where the danger was greatest A large part of the forces were concentrated in the Volokolamsk-Klin and Istra sectors, where we were expecting the main blow of the enemy armoured units to fall Reserves were also brought up to the Tula-Serpukhov area, where we were expecting renewed attacks by the 2nd Panzer and 4th Field Armies In all, between November 1 and 15 the Western Front was reinforced with 100,000 effectives, 300 tanks and 2 000 guns

I had one rather unpleasant telephone conversation with the Supreme C-in-C

'What s the enemy up to? Stalin asked

They re completing concentration of their shock forces, and will no doubt soon be mounting the offensive, I replied

And where do you expect the main blow to come?

We expect the strongest attack in the Volokolamsk area Also Guderian s Army will most likely by-pass Tula and strike towards Kashira

Shaposhnikov and I think the attack being prepared by the enemy should be frustrated by forestalling them with counter-attacks One counter-attack should be launched in the Volokolamsk area the other from the Serpukhov area on the flank of the German 4th Army That seems to be where large forces are being concentiated for the attack on Moscow

'What forces are we supposed to use for these counter-attacks? The Western Front has none to spare We only have the forces necessary for defence

In the Volokolamsk area you will use the right flank units of Rokossovsky s army, an armoured division and Dovator s Cavalry Corps In the Serpukhov area use Belov s Cavalry Corps, Hetman s Armoured Division and units of the 49th Army

We can t possibly do that now We cannot afford to throw our last reserves into counter-attacks the success of which is highly doubtful We shall have nothing left for reinforcing our armies defence when the enemy assumes the offensive with his shock formation '

"Your Front has six armies Isn t that enough?

"But the troops of the Western Front are defending an extremely long line It now stretches for almost four hundred miles We have very few reserves in depth, especially in the centre

You can consider the question of the counter-attacks decided Inform me of your plan this evening, Stalin snapped irritatedly

About a quarter of an hour later Bulganin came to see me

Phew! I ve really been given the works! he exclaimed as he came in the door

'What happened?

'Stalin said 'You and Zhukov have got a bit too big for your boots But we ll cut you down to size too if need be He demanded that I come straight to you and the two of us go to work immediately on planning the counter-attacks

'Well, in that case, sit down and we ll send for Sokolovsky and warn Rokossovsky and Zakharkin

A couple of hours later the Front HQ issued the order for the counter-attacks to the commanders and officers of the 16th and

49th Armies, and informed the GHQ that we had done so However these counter-attacks, in which mainly cavalry was employed, did not produce all the positive results the C-in-C had expected The enemy was pretty strong and his offensive ardour had not yet cooled

For the resumption of their offensive against Moscow, the nazi command brought up fresh forces, and by November 15 had concentrated 51 divisions against our Western Front, including 31 infantry, 13 tank and 7 motorised divisions, well up to strength and well-supplied with tanks, artillery and other equipment

In the Volokolamsk-Klin and Istra sectors, the enemy had concentrated the 3rd and 4th Panzer groups composed of seven panzer three motorised and three infantry divisions, supported by almost two thousand guns and powerful air cover

The enemy shock group in the Tula-Kashira area included the 24th and 47th Motorised Corps, the 53rd and 43rd Army Corps numbering nine divisions (four of them armoured) and the *Grosses Deutschland* SS Motorised Regiment with massive air support

The German 4th Field Army, made up of six army corps, was deployed in the Zvenigorod, Kubinka, Naro-Fominsk, Podolsk and Serpukhov areas It was this army that had orders to pin down the forces of the Western Front with fierce frontal attacks, weaken them, and then smash through the centre of our front in the direction of Moscow

On November 15, the Germans launched Operation Typhoon, the second phase of their offensive on Moscow, with an attack against the 30th Army of the Kalinin Front, whose defences to the south of the Volga Reservoir were very weak indeed Simultaneously, the enemy struck at the right flank of the 16th Army of the Western Front, south of the river Shosha and launched a supporting attack in the Teryaeva Sloboda area in the same army's sector

The enemy threw in over three hundred panzers against the 30th Army, which disposed of only 56 light, poorly armed tanks, and before long had breached its defences

On the morning of November 16, the enemy began a rapid advance on Klin We had no reserves in the area, since they had been transferred on orders from the GHQ to the Volokolamsk area for the counter-attack and had been pinned down there by the enemy

The same day the nazis struck a powerful blow in the Volokolamsk area Two tank and two infantry divisions advanced towards

Istra The enemy threw in 400 medium panzers against our 150 light tanks Fighting of extreme ferocity ensued General Panfilov s 316th, General Beloborodov s 78th and General Chernyshev s 18th Infantry Divisions, the First Guards 23rd 27th, and 28th detached Tank Brigades and General Dovator s Cavalry fought with particular stubbornness

At 11 p m on November 17, the GHQ transferred the 30th Army of the Kalinin Front to the Western Front, extending our defence lines even further to the north (as far as the Volga Reservoir) General Khomenko was relieved of his command by the GHQ s order, and General Lelyushenko appointed in his place

In the fighting of the 16th-18th our troops found themselves particularly hard-pressed Despite heavy losses, the enemy was forging ahead pressing on in his efforts to drive his armoured spearheads through to Moscow

But thanks to our artillery and anti-tank defences in depth and superb co-ordination between all arms the enemy was unable to break through The 16th Army gradually withdrew in perfect order to the defence lines which had been prepared in advance and were already manned by artillery and there continued to fight stubbornly, repulsing one ferocious nazi onslaught after another

The First Tank Guards Brigade, which had been assigned to the 16th Army, fought with unparalleled courage In October the Brigade (then the 4th Armoured) had fought heroically near Orel and Mtsensk, and had been awarded the honorary title of Guards Brigade Now, in November, the tank guards were further enhancing their glorious reputation on the approaches to Moscow

Meanwhile in Moscow, the State Defence Committee and part of the leadership of the Party Central Committee and the Council of People s Commissars were carrying on their work as usual The workers of the capital toiled from 12 to 18 hours a day to supply the troops defending the city with arms, equipment and ammunition

But the capital was still in danger

Shortly after the enemy breakthrough in the sector of the 30th Army of the Kalinin Front and on the right flank of the 16th Army–I don t remember the exact date–Stalin phoned me and asked

'Are you sure we shall hold Moscow? It pains me to ask you but tell me honestly, as a Communist

We shall hold Moscow alright, but we shall need at least two more armies and a couple of hundred tanks

' It s good to hear you re so sure, Stalin said "Telephone the General Staff and arrange with them where you want the two

reserve armies you request concentrated They will be ready by the end of November But we can t give you any tanks at the moment

Half an hour later I arranged with Vassilevsky for the 1st Shock Army to be concentrated in the Yakhroma area and the 10th Army in the Ryazan area

The enemy mounted their offensive in the Tula-Moscow direction on November 18 The 3rd, 4th and 17th Panzer Divisions advanced in the Venev area, which was defended by the 413th and 299th Infantry Divisions of the 50th Army

The Germans breached our defences and captured the Bolokhovo-Dedilovo area We rushed in the 239th Infantry and the 41st Cavalry Divisions to try and save the situation in the Uzlovaya area Ferocious fighting went on day and night, the units of the 413th Infantry Division putting up particularly stubborn resistance

On November 21st, the main forces of Guderian s panzer army occupied Uzlovaya and Stalinogorsk, and the German 47th Motorised Corps advanced on Mikhailovo Tula was seriously threatened

In view of this grave situation the war council of the Western Front decided to reinforce the Kashira sector with the 112th Tank Division under Colonel Getman (now Army General), the Ryazan sector with a tank brigade and other units, the Zaraisk sector with the 9th Tank Brigade, the 35th and 127th detached Tank Battalions and the Laptyev sector with the 510th Infantry Regiment and a tank company

On November 26th the 3rd Panzer Division managed to press back our units and cut the Tula-Moscow railroad and highway to the north of Tula However, General Belov s 1st Cavalry Corps, the 112th Tank Division and other units in the Kashira area checked the enemy s further advance The 173rd Infantry Division and the 15th Rocket Launcher Regiment were thrown in as reinforcements On November 27, Belov s Cavalry, together with the 112th Tank Division, the 173rd Infantry Division and other units, counter-attacked Guderian s troops and threw them back nearly ten miles southwards in the direction of Mordves

Fierce fighting continued in the Kashira-Mordves area until the 30th, but the enemy made no further headway Guderian, commander of the 2nd Panzer Army convinced himself of the impossibility of overcoming the resistance of the Soviet forces in the Kashira-Tula area and breaking through to Moscow, and the nazis soon assumed the defensive in this sector

The situation was far less bright on the right flank of the front, in the Istra-Klin-Solnechnogorsk area

On November 23rd enemy tanks broke into Klin Threatened with encirclement, the units of the 16th Army had to be withdrawn during the night to the next rear line After bitter fighting the 16th Army abandoned the town The loss of Klin meant that there was now a badly covered gap in our defences between the 16th and 30th Armies

On November 25, the 16th Army withdrew from Solnechnogorsk The situation in this sector was fraught with danger The Front war council placed at the disposal of the 16th Army command everything it could possibly spare from other sectors of the front, including small groups of soldiers with anti-tank rifles, separate tank units, artillery batteries, and AA battalions taken from General Gromadin, commander of the Moscow Air Defence Area The enemy had to be stalled at all costs until the arrival of the 7th Infantry Division from the Serpukhov area and two tank brigades and two anti-tank artillery regiments from the GHQ reserves

Our front had been bent like a bow, and several very weak spots had formed it seemed the irreparable was about to happen But no, the troops did not lose heart, and once having been reinforced, once again formed an impenetrable wall

On the evening of November 29, taking advantage of our weak defence of the bridge over the Moscow-Volga canal in the Yakhroma area, an enemy panzer unit captured it and crossed the canal It was stopped by forward units of the 1st Shock Army under General Kuznetsov that had been rushed to the spot, and after a ferocious battle was hurled back to the farther bank

The situation certainly gave cause for alarm It is therefore not surprising perhaps that things should sometimes have happened which can only be put down to the nerve-racking situation at the time Here is an example

Somehow it was reported to the Supreme C-in-C that our troops had abandoned the town of Dedovsk, north-west of Nakhabino but a stone s throw from the capital

Stalin, not unnaturally, was extremely worried by the news On the 28th and 29th of November, the 9th Infantry Guards Division under General Beloborodov had been pretty successful in repulsing one fierce enemy attack after another in the Istra area And now less than twenty-four hours later Dedovsk was reported to be in nazi hands

Stalin telephoned me

Were you aware that Dedovsk has fallen? he asked

No Comrade Stalin, I wasn t '

A Commander should know what is going on on his front!" the C-in-C burst out angrily He ordered me to leave right away to

personally take charge of organising a counter-attack and recapture Dedovsk

I tried to object, saying that it was hardly wise for me to leave HQ at such a moment

Never mind, we ll manage here somehow Have General Sokolovsky replace you while you re away '

Immediately on replacing the receiver I got through to Rokossovsky and demanded an explanation of why the Front HQ had heard nothing about the withdrawal from Dedovsk Bebore long it became clear that the enemy had not captured the town of Dedovsk, and that there had probably been some confusion with the small village of Dedovo The 9th Guards Division was engaged in fierce fighting in the Khovanskoye-Dedovo-Snegiri area, preventing the enemy from breaking through along the Volokolamsk Highway towards Dedovsk and Nakhabino

There had obviously been a mistake I decided to telephone the GHQ and explain that it was purely a misunderstanding But I was running my head against a brick wall, as the saying goes The C-in-C really flared up this time He demanded that I go straight to Rokossovsky and see to it that this unfortunate village was recaptured from the enemy without fail, and moreover ordered me to take General Govorov, commander of the 5th Army, with me

He s an artilleryman Let him help Rokossovsky organise artillery support for the 16th Army '

It was pointless to argue in this sort of situation When I called General Govorov and informed him of our task, he not unnaturally tried to point out that the journey was not really necessary the 16th Army had its own Artillery Commander General Kazakov, and besides, the commander himself knew what should be done and how, and why on earth should he leave his army at such a critical time

To cut short further discussion, I told the General that it was Stalin s orders

We called for Rokossovsky and immediately set off together for Beloborodov s division The General could not have been exactly overjoyed by our appearance He had worries enough of his own as it was, without having to go into explanations about the few houses of the village of Dedovo on the far side of the ravine that were in enemy hands

Reporting on the situation, the Commander explained pretty convincingly that the recapture of those houses was not very wise for various tactical considerations Unfortunately, I could not tell him that in this case I was unable to let myself be guided by

anything like tactical considerations I therefore ordered Beloborodov to send in an infantry regiment and two tanks, and throw out the German platoon occupying the houses This was done, I believe, at dawn on December 1

But let us return to more serious matters

On December 1 the nazis made an unexpected breakthrough at the centre of our front at the limiting point of our 5th and 33rd armies, and advanced along the highway towards Kubinka However, at the village of Akulovo they were stopped by the 32nd Infantry Division which destroyed large numbers of enemy tanks with artillery fire Many more tanks were crippled on mine-fields After suffering heavy losses, the enemy tanks turned towards Golitsyno, where they were completely routed by the front reserves and newly arrived units of the 5th and 33rd Armies On December 4 this breakthrough was completely contained and checked The enemy left behind 10,000 dead, 50 burned out tanks and large quantities of other equipment

By the beginning of December it became apparent from the nature of the German operations and the strength of their attacks that the enemy was labouring, and no longer had either the men or the equipment for all-out offensive operations

By deploying his shock forces over a wide front and brandishing his armoured fist too wildly, the enemy had let his troops become so spread out along the front that in the final attacks on the approaches to the capital he had lost his striking power The nazi command had not expected such high casualties in the Battle of Moscow, and were now unable to make up their losses and provide reinforcements

We learned from interrogations of prisoners that some companies had been reduced to 20 or 30 men, the soldiers morale had gone down sharply, and they were no longer confident of capturing Moscow

The forces of the Western Front had also suffered extremely heavy losses and were exhausted, but they had not let the enemy through, and reinforced with reserves and encouraged by the Party every soldier fought like ten men on the approaches to Moscow

In the twenty days of their second Moscow offensive the Germans lost over 155,000 men in dead and wounded, about 800 tanks, over 300 guns and some 1,500 aircraft These heavy losses and the failure to accomplish their objectives had sown doubt among the German troops in the successful outcome of the war as a whole The nazi military and political leadership had lost its reputation of being invincible in the eyes of the world

Today the ex-nazi Generals and Field-Marshals are trying to lay the blame for the failure of the plan to capture Moscow and for the loss of the war in general squarely on Hitler, for his having turned a deaf ear to their advice and calling halt in the advance of Army Group Centre in August, diverting part of its forces to the Ukraine.

Thus Mellenthin writes: "The attack on Moscow which Guderian supported and which we temporarily renounced in August, deciding to seize the Ukraine first, might well have brought decisive success if it had always been regarded as the main blow, determining the outcome of the whole war. Russia would have been hit in her very heart."

Generals Guderian, Hoth and others, consider the main reason for the defeat of their troops at Moscow to have been, apart from Hitler's blunders, the severe Russian winter.

Naturally, climate and topography do play a role in any military operations. But they affect both sides equally. The hitlerites wrapped themselves up in warm things looted from the local population, and wore hideous home-made straw boots. Sheepskin coats, felt boots, padded jackets and warm underwear, are all weapons too, and we made sure our soldiers were warmly clad, while the hitlerite leadership arranged for "travelling light" through Russia, had estimated the whole campaign in weeks and months. It thus appears that political and strategical miscalculations by the nazi hierarchy were what was really to blame.

Other Generals and bourgeois historians blame the mud and impassable roads. But I saw with my own eyes how thousands upon thousands of Moscow women left the comfort of their homes to do heavy navvy work for which they were altogether unsuited—digging anti-tank ditches and trenches, erecting barricades and obstacles and lugging heavy sand bags—in those very same conditions. The mud stuck to their feet, to the wheelbarrows in which they carted earth, and to their spades, making the digging, which was really a man's work anyway, incomparably more difficult.

I might add for the benefit of those who are trying to blame the bad weather as the real reason for the German defeat in the Battle of Moscow that in October 1941 the period of rain and mud was unusually short. The temperature dropped sharply at the very beginning of November, snow fell and all the roads and countryside became quite passable. During the November "general offensive", the temperature in the area of operations on the Moscow front remained stable at minus 7° to minus 10° Centigrade, so that mud was clearly out of the question.

No, it was not rain and snow that brought the nazi offensive to a halt. The more than million-strong forces of picked nazi troops were crushed by the stubborn resistance, courage and heroism of the Red Army troops, backed up by their people, their capital and their Country.

As for the interruption of the advance on Moscow and the diverting of forces to the Ukraine the position of the German Army Group Centre might well have been far worse than it actually was. The GHQ reserves which were used to fill the breaches in the south-west direction in September, and in November defended the immediate approaches to the capital, could have been used for a blow on the flank and in the rear of Army Group Centre during its advance on Moscow.

Furious at the failure of the Moscow offensive, putting an end to his plans for a "lightning war", Hitler sought scapegoats and dismissed the commander of the Wehrmacht land forces, General Brauchitsch, the commander of Army Group Centre, von Bock, the commander of the 2nd Panzer Army, Guderian, and dozens of other generals, to whom only two months before he had lavishly awarded crosses. Hitler declared himself C-in-C of the land forces, apparently in the belief that this would have a magic influence on the troops.

I have frequently been asked how it was that the Red Army managed to defeat the strong nazi grouping at Moscow and hurl what was left of it back westwards in the most severe winter conditions. A great deal has been written about the defeat of the Germans in the Battle of Moscow, and I would agree with most of it. However, as former commander of the Western Front, I should like to express my own opinion on the matter.

In mounting their offensive on Moscow, Operation Typhoon, the Germans intended to rout the Soviet forces in the Vyazma-Moscow and Bryansk-Moscow directions, and by enveloping Moscow from the north and south, capture it in the shortest possible time. The enemy made a consistent effort to achieve this strategic objective by means of successive two-stage pincer operations. The first encirclement and rout of the Soviet forces was to be effected in the Bryansk and Vyazma areas. This was to be followed up by the encirclement and capture of Moscow by the deep envelopment of the city by armoured units to the north-west via Klin, and to the south-west via Tula and Kashira, closing the pincers to complete the encirclement in the area of Noginsk.

However, the German High Command seriously miscalculated the troops and equipment that would be needed for such a com-

plex large-scale strategic operation as Typhoon They underrated the strength of the Red Army and overestimated their own

The forces mustered by the nazi High Command were only sufficient to breach our defences in the Vyazma and Bryansk areas and press back the forces of the Western and Kalinin Fronts to the Kalinin-Yakhroma-Krasnaya Polyana-Kryukovo-Nara and Oka rivers-Tula-Kashira-Mikhailov line It should be stressed once more that the enemy was greatly hindered from carrying his main aim—the capture of Moscow—into effect by the heroic resistance of the Soviet forces encircled to the west of Vyazma Although the enemy had achieved his immediate aim at the beginning of October, he had failed to put the second stage of the operation into effect

There were also serious errors in the formation of shock troops for the second stage of Operation Typhoon The enemy's flank groupings especially those operating in the Tula area, were weak and lacked sufficient infantry units They suffered heavy casualties and lost their striking power The German High Command failed to strike simultaneously in the centre of the front although there they did have the wherewithal This enabled us to freely transfer all our reserves, including whole divisions, from quiet sectors in the centre to the flanks, and commit them to action against the enemy shock groups

Some military histories maintain that the October battles of the Western, Reserve and Bryansk Fronts are not really part of the cycle of operations of the Battle of Moscow proper that the Germans were first halted on the Mozhaisk Line and that Hitler's generals then set about planning a new general offensive

All that we have said above about the failure of Operation Typhoon clearly controverts this assertion Equally unconvincing is the argument that in November the Germans were forced to considerably reinforce their troops and replenish their supplies and redeploy the armoured units on their left flank After all, such measures are rule in all offensive operations, and they can therefore be discounted as factors determining the results of such an operation

At the beginning of November we managed to ascertain in good time that the enemy was concentrating forces on our flanks and thus to correctly determine the direction of his main effort We organised strong defences in depth in these sectors, with sufficient anti-tank protection and fieldworks We also concentrated our main armoured units in the most threatened sectors

By the beginning of December the Germans had suffered heavy losses Their communications stretching to over six hundred miles

were constantly being harassed by partisan groups, which by their heroic operations disrupted the enemy supply lines and the work of his rear units

Their heavy losses, the protracted nature of the campaign and the fierce resistance of the Red Army, had a telling effect on the fighting efficiency of the German troops, undermining their morale and their faith in victory

The Soviet forces had also suffered heavy losses in the Battle of Moscow, but they had the constant support from their Country and right through to the end of the defensive struggle retained their fighting efficiency and firm faith in victory

The Soviet people and the Armed Forces had lived through their gravest hour, and were already experiencing the joy of the first victories The Red Army had frustrated Hitler s plan to capture Leningrad and join hands with the Finnish Army Mounting a counter-offensive in the Tikhvin area, it had defeated the enemy and occupied the town The troops of the Southern Front had also counter-attacked and recaptured Rostov

Encouraged by their successes in the defensive fighting, our troops outside Moscow, immediately, without any pause, went over to the offensive The Moscow counter-offensive had been prepared in the course of the defensive battles and the details as to exactly how it should be carried out were finally determined when it became clear that the nazis were no longer able to sustain our counter-attacks

To take advantage of the favourable situation in the Moscow area, the GHQ ordered a joint counter-offensive by troops of the Western and Kalinin Fronts and the right flank of the South-Western Front At the end of November and the beginning of December, the Supreme Command, with the agreement of the war council of the Western Front, had concentrated the 1st Shock Army north-west of Moscow, to the east of the Moscow-Volga canal At the same time the 10th Army was concentrated in the Ryazan area

On November 29 I telephoned the Supreme C-in-C and after reporting on the situation asked him to issue an order subordinating the 1st Shock Army and the 10th Army to the Western Front so that we might step up our attacks and hurl the enemy further back from Moscow

After hearing me out, Stalin asked

"Are you quite sure the enemy has come to a critical pass, and cannot commit some new large forces to action?'

'The enemy is exhausted, but without the 1st and 10th Armies our troops will be unable to liquidate his dangerous wedges If we

do not liquidate them immediately, the enemy will later be able to reinforce his troops in the Moscow area with strong reserves from his northern and southern groupings, and then we might well be faced with an extremely dangerous situation

Stalin said he would consult the General Staff

I asked Sokolovsky, the Front Chief of Staff (who also considered that now was the time to commit the 1st and 10th Armies to action) to get in touch with the General Staff and convince them to transfer the reserve armies to the Front in the shortest possible time Late in the evening of November 29, we were informed of the GHQ decision to transfer the 1st Shock Army, the 10th Army and all units of the 20th Army to the Western Front At the same time the GHQ ordered us to report how we intended to employ these armies

Next morning we submitted our plan to the GHQ which was briefly as follows

The 1st Shock Army under General Kuznetsov was to deploy all its forces in the Dmitrov-Yakhroma area and strike out jointly with the 30th and 20th Armies in the direction of Klin, and further on in the general direction of Teryaeva Sloboda

The 20th Army was to strike from the Krasnaya Polyana-Bely Rast area jointly with the 1st Shock Army and the 16th Army, in the general direction of Solnechnogorsk, envelop it from the south, and press on towards Volokolamsk The right flank of the 16th Army was to strike towards Kryukovo, and further, depending on the situation

The 10th Army, in co-operation with the 50th Army, was to attack in the Stalinogorsk-Bogoroditsk direction, and develop its offensive in the area south of the river Upa

The immediate aim of the counter-offensive on the flanks of the Western Front was to rout the shock forces of Army Group Centre and eliminate the direct threat to the capital We had not yet the necessary strength at the time to set the troops more ambitious aims We were merely attempting to hurl the enemy as far back from Moscow as possible, inflicting the maximum losses on them

Despite the addition of these three Armies, the Western Front still had not achieved numerical superiority over the enemy, except in aircraft The enemy had clear superiority in tanks and artillery This was the special feature of our Moscow counter-offensive

At the first stage of the counter-offensive the 5th, 33rd and 49th Armies were assigned the task of pinning down the enemy troops by active operations at the centre of our Front, and preparing for an all-out counter-offensive

On December 4, late in the evening, the Supreme C-in-C telephoned me and asked how else he could help the Front, apart from what had already been done

I replied that we badly needed the support of the Supreme Command s airforce reserves and the national anti-aircraft service and at least another two hundred manned tanks We had not enough tanks, and would be unable to quickly exploit our counter-offensive without them

We can t give you any tanks because we haven t got them Stalin replied 'But you ll get some aircraft alright Contact the General Staff about it I ll phone them Remember that the Kalinin Front is to assume the offensive on December 5, and the operational group on the right flank of the South-Western Front will assume the offensive in the Yelets area on the 6th

Fresh snow falls greatly hindered the concentration, regrouping and deployment of the troops in the areas in which the offensive was to be launched But these difficulties were overcome and by the morning of December 6th all arms were ready for the new phase of the Battle of Moscow

On December 6 1941, the troops of the Western Front launched their counter-offensive to the north and south of the capital The neighbouring fronts advanced in the Kalinin and Yelets area A spectacular battle began

On the very first day of the offensive the troops of the Kalinin Front drove spearheads into the German forward lines but were unable to overrun them Only after ten days of stubborn fighting when the right flank of the Western Front had defeated the German group in the Rogachevo-Solnechnogorsk area and enveloped Klin did the forces of the Front begin to make any appreciable headway

The 1st Shock Army and units of the 30th Army reached Klin on December 13 Encircling the town the Soviet troops broke into it from all sides, and after ferocious fighting cleared it of the enemy on the night of the 15th

The 20th and 16th Armies developed their offensive operations successfully By the evening of December 9, the 20th Army had overcome the stubborn enemy resistance and approached Solnechnogorsk, recapturing it on the 11th The 16th Army liberated Kryukovo on the 8th and advanced in the direction of the Istra Reservoir

The right flank of the 5th Army under General Govorov also advanced, thereby greatly contributing to the success of the 16th Army

On December 19th we suffered a grievous loss when General Dovator Commander of the 2nd Cavalry Guards Corps, and Lieutenant-Colonel Tavliyev, Commander of the 20th Cavalry Division, were killed in action near the village of Palashkino seven miles north-west of the river Ruza. On the instance of the Front War Council, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet posthumously awarded Dovator the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

The right flank of the Western Front developed its counter-offensive successfully, actively supported by the Front airforce, the anti-aircraft units and long-range aircraft under the command of General Golovanov. The airforce pounded the enemy's artillery positions, tank units and command posts, and when the German withdrawal began, dive-bombed the enemy infantry, armoured and transport columns. As a result the roads to the west along which the enemy retreated were littered with abandoned equipment and lorries.

Ski units cavalry and air-borne troops operated in the enemy rear mercilessly harassing the retreating Germans. The partisans co-ordinating their raids with the Front War Councils, were a serious nuisance to the German Command.

On December 3, troops of the 50th Army and General Belov's cavalry corps on the left flank of the Front attacked Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army in the Tula area. Guderian's 3rd and 17th Panzer Divisions and 29th Motorised Division fell back rapidly on Venev, leaving 70 gutted out tanks on the battlefield.

On December 6, the 10th Army went over into the offensive in the Mikhailov area where the enemy tried to hold on to their positions in order to protect the flank of the retreating 2nd Panzer Army. The remaining units of the 50th Army assumed the offensive on December 8, threatening to cut off the enemy's lines of retreat from Venev and Mikhailov.

Guderian's Army, deeply outflanked by our Western Front and the operational group of the South-Western Front, and lacking the strength to counter-attack began a hurried withdrawal in the general direction of Uzlovaya, Bogoroditsk and on towards Sukhinichi, abandoning heavy guns, lorries and tanks.

In ten days of fighting the troops of the left flank of the Western Front routed Guderian's panzer army and advanced almost 90 miles.

To the left of the Western Front, units of the newly formed Bryansk Front were pressing forward successfully. The first stage of the Soviet counter-offensive ended with the Red Army occupying a line from Oreshki-Staritsa-the Lama and Ruza rivers-Malo-

yaroslavets-Tikhonova Pustyn-Kaluga-Mosalsk-Sukhinichi-Belev-Mtsensk-Novosil Tula had finally been completely relieved The main role here had been played by Getman's tank division, Belov's cavalry corps, and the operational group of the 50th Army under General Popov

The nazi armies, severely weakened and exhausted from battles in which they had suffered heavy losses, were being pressed back westwards by the advancing Red Army As we saw it, the next stage of the counter-offensive in the western direction (the Western Kalinin and Bryansk Fronts) should be to bring up reinforcements and fresh equipment, and carry on until we had returned to the positions these Fronts had occupied before the beginning of Operation Typhoon

If the GHQ could have provided us with at least four more armies (one each for the Kalinin and Bryansk Fronts, and two for the Western Front), we would have had a real chance to inflict further defeats on the enemy, continue to press him back westwards from Moscow and advance to the Vitebsk-Smolensk-Bryansk line

Anyway, it was unanimously agreed in the war council and the Front Staff that in continuing the counter-offensive all the available forces should be concentrated in the western strategic direction in order to inflict the heaviest losses on the enemy

The success of the December counter-offensive in the western direction was of tremendous importance the shock groups of Army Group Centre had suffered a serious defeat and been forced to retreat But, on the whole, the enemy was still very strong both in the western and other sectors of the Front In the central sector the Germans had put up ferocious resistance, while our victories in the Rostov and Tikhvin offensives, although at first successful, had been incomplete and both sides had settled down to protracted positional warfare

However, after the failure of the nazi attempt to capture Moscow and the successful counter-offensive the Supreme C-in-C was extremely optimistic, and thought the Germans would be unable to withstand the Red Army attacks on the other Fronts too Hence the idea of launching as soon as possible a general offensive along the whole Soviet-German front, from Lake Ladoga to the Black Sea

As a member of the GHQ, I was summoned on the evening of January 5 to a Supreme Command meeting to discuss a draft plan for a general Red Army offensive After Shaposhnikov had made a short report on the situation at the Fronts and read us the draft plan, Stalin spoke

The Germans have been demoralised by their defeat at Moscow, and are ill-prepared for the winter, he said Now is the most suitable time to mount a general offensive

The Supreme C-in-C s idea was that in view of the successful development of the counter-offensive by the three western Fronts, the aim of the general offensive should be the defeat of the enemy near Leningrad, to the west of Moscow and in the south of the country

The main blow was to be struck against Army Group Centre To achieve this the forces of the left flank of the North-Western Front, and the Kalinin and Western Fronts should be used in a pincer movement with the object of encircling the enemy s main forces in the Rzhev-Vyazma-Smolensk area

The troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts, the right flank of the North-Western Front and the Baltic Fleet were to defeat Army Group North and relieve Leningrad

The troops of the South-Western and Southern Fronts were to defeat Army Group South and liberate the Donbas, while the Caucasian Front and Black Sea Fleet were to recapture the Crimea

It was intended to mount the general offensive in an extremely short space of time

Stalin asked those present if they would like to make any comments on the proposed plan

'In the western direction,' I said, 'where the most favourable conditions have developed and the enemy has not yet had time to reorganise his units and restore their fighting efficiency, the offensive should be continued But to be successful the troops need to be reinforced and supplied with more equipment, and backed up by new reserves, especially armoured units

'As for an offensive in the Leningrad area and in the south-west, our troops there face extremely strong enemy defence Without powerful artillery support they will be unable to breach the enemy lines, and will wear themselves out and suffer heavy, quite unwarranted losses in the attempt I am all for strengthening the western Fronts and launching a more powerful offensive there '

We haven t the sufficient material resources at present to provide for a simultaneous offensive on all fronts," Voznesensky put in

I have spoken to Timoshenko,' Stalin said, 'and he is in favour of mounting the offensive We must mangle the Germans so that they can t advance in the spring "

Has anyone else anything to say?" Stalin asked

There was no answer
Well then in that case we can wind up on that "
When we left the room Shaposhnikov said
'You were wasting your time arguing the Supreme C-in-C had already decided the matter
Then why did he ask my opinion?"
'I don t know, old fellow, I don t know!' Shaposhnikov said with a heavy sigh
We received the instruction on the offensive at Front HQ on January 7 In accordance with the instruction the War Council set the troops the following additional tasks for the continuation of the counter-offensive
1 The right flank (the 1st Shock Army and the 20th and 16th Armies) to continue their offensive in the general direction of Sychevka and jointly with the Kalinin Front smash the enemy s Sychevka-Rzhev group,
2 The centre (the 5th and 33rd Armies) to advance in the general direction of Mozhaisk and Gzhatsk, the 43rd, 49th and 50th Armies to attack Yukhnov, defeat the enemy grouping in the Yukhnov-Kondrovo area, and advance on Vyazma,
3 General Belov s reinforced cavalry corps to meet up with General Sokolov s 2nd Cavalry Corps of the Kalinin Front in the Vyazma area for a combined attack on the rear of the enemy s Vyazma grouping (at that time strong partisan units were active in the Vyazma area),
4 The 10th Army to advance on Kirov and cover the left flank of the Front
Our neighbour on the right, the Kalinin Front, was to advance in the general direction of Sychevka and Vyazma, enveloping Rzhev with part of its forces, the 22nd Army was to mount an attack on Bely
The North-Western Front was to develop an offensive in two directions simultaneously The 3rd Shock Army under General Purkayev was to advance in the general direction of Velikiye Luki while the 4th Army under General Yeremenko was to advance on Toropets and Velizh
The armies of the right flank of the South-Western Front and the Bryansk Front were given the task of pinning down the enemy to prevent him from transferring any troops to the centre or the Donbas
The troops of the south-western sectors were to recapture Kharkov and the German springboards in the Dniepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye areas

It was an ambitious plan, and in many sectors of the Front we just did not have the men or weapons for it. All this affected the pace and results of our winter offensive. The advance of the troops of the North-Western Front alone developed successfully, for here the enemy had no solid defence line.

By the beginning of February, the 3rd and 4th Shock Armies of the North-Western Front had advanced as far as Velikiye Luki, Demidov and Velizh, a matter of some 150 miles. The 22nd Army of the Kalinin Front was by this time fighting for the town of Bely and the 2nd Cavalry Corps had advanced to the north-west of Vyazma. The 39th and 29th Armies of the Kalinin Front were slowly pressing forward to the west of Rzhev, but the left flank of the Front was powerless to advance in the face of strong enemy resistance.

The nature of the enemy resistance at this period was in accordance with Hitler's instruction of January 3, 1942, which included the following order: "To hold on to every town and village, without taking a single step back, and fight to the last bullet, to the last grenade—this is what is required of us at this time!"

The commander of the 23rd Wehrmacht Infantry Division issued the following order: "Commanders! The general operational situation demands that we halt the rapid retreat of our units at the river Lama and prepare the division for stubborn defence. The position on the river Lama must be defended to the last man. It is a matter of life or death for us."

The nazi High Command was counting on the fact that there were fortifications there built by our troops in October and November where they could make a temporary stand. These fortifications extended along both sides of the river from north to south, eventually joining up with the fortifications on the rivers Ruza and Nara.

Moreover, by the middle of December, by bringing up all sorts of troops from the rear—newly recruited units, reserves and divisions transferred from the occupied territories—the enemy had managed to fully man these fortifications for defence. By the time the troops retreating from Moscow reached these defence lines work to strengthen the fortifications had already been completed.

On January 10, after an hour and a half of artillery preparation, the troops of the Western Front (the 20th and part of the 1st Shock Army, Pliyev's 2nd Cavalry Corps, the 22nd Tank Brigade and five battalions of ski troops) launched an attack with the aim of breaching the front in the Volokolamsk area. After two days of stubborn fighting the breach was made, and General Pliyev's

Cavalry Corps, the five battalions of ski troops and the 22nd Tank Brigade swarmed into it

On January 16 and 17, the right flank of the Western Front supported by partisan units captured Lotoshino and Shakhovskaya and straddled the Moscow-Rzhev railway It would have seemed that this was the ideal spot to concentrate forces and follow up the initial success But things turned out otherwise

On January 19, the order came to withdraw the 1st Shock Army to the GHQ reserves Sokolovsky and I phoned the GHQ and asked to be allowed to keep it We were simply told that those were the Supreme C-in-C s orders I rang Stalin, only to be told Withdraw it I don t intend to discuss the matter When I tried to explain that this move would seriously weaken our offensive capacity he replied You have plenty of troops Just count how many armies you have '

I said that we had an extremely wide front, that fierce fighting was going on in all sectors and any regrouping was impossible, and asked permission for the withdrawal of the 1st Shock Army to be deferred until the offensive now in progress had been completed, so as not to weaken our striking capacity on the right flank Instead of answering Stalin put down the receiver My conversations on the subject with Shaposhnikov proved equally futile

I can t do anything, old fellow, Shaposhnikov said It s the personal decision of the Supreme C-in-C

The 20th Army had to be deployed over a wide front Thus weakened, our right flank was halted by the well-organised enemy defence near Gzhatsk, and was unable to advance any further

By January 20, the 5th and 33rd Armies advancing in the central sector had recaptured Ruza, Dorokhovo, Mozhaisk and Vereya The 43rd and 49th Armies drove forward as far as the Domanovo area and engaged the enemy s Yukhnov grouping

I should like to dwell somewhat more fully here on the Red Army operations in the Vyazma area Between the 18th and the 22nd of January two battalions of the 201st Paratroop Brigade and the 250th Paratroop Regiment were dropped in the Zhelanye area, twenty-five miles south of Vyazma General Yefremov s 33rd Army was ordered to develop the breach that had been made, and recapture Vyazma in a combined operation with Belov s 1st Cavalry Corps, the paratroopers, the 2nd Cavalry Corps of the Kalinin Front and partisan units

On January 27, Belov's Cavalry broke through to the Warsaw Highway 22 miles south of Yukhnov, joining up three days later with the paratroopers and partisan units south of Vyazma On

February 1, three infantry divisions of the 33rd Army (the 113th, 338th and 160th) under General Yefremov s personal command met up with them and engaged the enemy on the approaches to Vyazma The GHQ ordered the 4th Airborne Corps to be dropped in the Ozerechnaya area to reinforce Belov s Cavalry and act jointly with the 2nd Cavalry Corps of the Kalinin Front, but due to the shortage of transport planes the 8th Airborne Brigade, composed of 2,000 men, was all that could be dropped

The 33rd Army developed its offensive in the Naro-Fominsk area in the general direction of Vyazma and on January 31 reached the Shansky Zavod-Domanovo area, where they found a wide gap in the enemy defences The absence of a continuous front gave us reason to suppose that the enemy had insufficient forces in this sector for the defence of Vyazma We therefore decided to take Vyazma by a *coup de main*, before the enemy had time to bring up reserves The fall of Vyazma would place the whole enemy group in the area in an extremely tricky position

General Yefremov himself assumed command of the Army shock group and crashed forward towards Vyazma

On February 3-4, when the main forces of this group composed of two divisions, had almost reached Vyazma, the enemy struck at the point where the breach had been made and re-established its defences on the Ugra river, cutting them off Meanwhile, the Army s second echelon had got held up in the Shansky Zavod area and its neighbour to the left, the 43rd Army, had been brought to a halt near Medyn The 43rd Army was unable to carry out the order from the Front HQ to come to the aid of General Yefremov

Belov s cavalry corps fighting in the Vyazma area had joined up with Yefremov s troops and also found itself cut off

Meanwhile, the Germans transferred large reserves from France and from other fronts to the Vyazma area and so reinforced their defences that, try as we may, we were unable to breach them

We therefore had to abandon this whole group in the enemy rear, in the wooded country to the south-west of Vyazma, which was active partisan territory

For two months Belov s Cavalry, Yefremov s group and the airborne units remained in the enemy rear, striking hard blows at the Germans and inflicting heavy losses on them in men and equipment

On February 10, the 8th Airborne Brigade together with several partisan units occupied the Morshanovo-Dyagilevo area, destroying the HQ of the German 5th Panzer Brigade and capturing a great deal of equipment The same day we informed Belov and

Yefremov of this, and ordered them to co-ordinate their own operations with the commander of the Brigade, whose headquarters were in Dyagilevo

Having established radio contact with Belov and Yefremov our Front HQ did everything in its power to drop supplies of ammunition and medical and food supplies to their troops Many of the wounded were evacuated by air General Golushkevich Chief of the Western Front Operations Division and liaison officers were often flown to the group

At the beginning of April the situation in the Vyazma area took a sharp turn for the worse The enemy concentrated large forces and went all out to eliminate this dangerous splinter before the spring When the thaw set in at the end of April it was no longer possible for the group to manoeuvre and maintain contact with the partisan areas from which it had been receiving food supplies and forage

The request of Belov and Yefremov to withdraw their troops and rejoin our main forces was granted by the Front command They received strict orders to make their withdrawal through the forest areas that were in partisan hands, in the general direction of Kirov where the 10th Army would have helped them to breach the enemy defences

General Belov s cavalry corps and the airborne units obeyed orders to the letter, and retreated by a roundabout horseshoe route to arrive in the sector of the 10th Army at the end of May to the beginning of June Skilfully by-passing strong enemy groupings and destroying weak ones on their way, they passed through the breach made by the 10th Army to rejoin our main forces Although they had lost much of their equipment and most of their heavy artillery during their operations in the enemy rear and their break-out, most of the men came through safe and sound What a joyous reunion that was between the men who had broken out of encirclement and the men of the Front who had helped them to do so! The soldiers and their commanders were not ashamed of their tears for they were tears of joy and comradeship

General Yefremov considered this route too long for his exhausted troops, and radioed the GHQ asking permission to break out by the shortest route, across the river Ugra

Stalin telephoned me there and then and asked if I agreed with Yefremov s proposal My reply was a categorical no But Stalin said that Yefremov was an experienced commander and we must agree The GHQ ordered a thrust by our forces to help out Yefremov It was prepared and carried out by the 43rd Army, but Yefremov s troops failed to follow it up with an attack from their side

We've learned later that the group had been smashed by the Germans on their way to the Ugra General Yefremov fought on bravely until he was seriously wounded and then shot himself rather than fall into enemy hands Such was the tragic end of a most skilful and brave commander Most of his heroic men fell with him

General Yefremov had assumed the command of the 33rd Army on October 25, 1941, when the enemy war crashing down on Moscow His men had fought magnificently in the Battle of Moscow, and had not let the enemy through For valour in the Battle of Moscow General Yefremov was awarded the Order of the Red Banner

Along with Yefremov died General Afrosimov, a skilful artillery commander and a fine man, and many other officers and political instructors who had distinguished themselves in the Battle of Moscow

Taking critical stock of these events today, I consider that we committed a serious blunder in our assessment of the situation in the Vyazma area We overrated our own driving force and underestimated that of the enemy, who proved a much harder nut to crack than we had supposed

In February and March the GHQ demanded that we step up our offensive in the western direction, but by that time our troops were worn out and we were short of weapons and ammunition

Indeed the country s war production in general was at a low ebb at the time Supplies were totally insufficient in the circumstances So much so, that every time we were summoned to the GHQ we literally begged the Supreme C-in-C for anti-tank weapons, submachine-guns, a mere ten to fifteen anti-tank guns, and even just a few shells and mines Everything we managed to obtain was immediately loaded onto lorries and sent off to the armies where the need was greatest

We were particularly hard up for ammunition Thus, we received only a fraction of the ammunition planned for the front in the first ten days of January–82-mm mortar shells–1 per cent, artillery shells–20-30 per cent In January on the whole we received 50-mm mortar shells–2 7 per cent, 120-mm mortar shells–36 per cent, 82-mm mortar shells–55 per cent and artillery shells–44 per cent As for February, of the 316 railway wagonloads planned for the first ten days of the month, not one was received We were so short of ammunition for the *Katyusha* rocket launchers that part of them had to be withdrawn to the rear

It probably takes some believing, but we had to fix a firing rate for each gun at 1-2 shots in twenty-four hours And this, mark you,

during an offensive! Our report to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief dated February 14, 1942, contained the following

Experience in the fighting has shown that the shortage of shells makes an artillery offensive impossible As a result the enemy s firing system is not destroyed and our units attacking the practically intact enemy defences suffer very heavy casualties to no avail

At the end of February and the beginning of March 1942 the GHQ decided to reinforce the Fronts operating in the western direction with reserves and equipment but this decision came too late to be of effect Disturbed by the recent developments, the enemy greatly reinforced his troops in the Vyazma area and launched counter-attacks from strongly fortified positions against the troops of the Western and Kalinin Fronts

Worn out and weakened our troops were finding it harder and harder to overcome the enemy resistance Our repeated reports and proposals to call a halt and dig in where we were were rejected by the GHQ On the contrary, the orders issued by the GHQ on March 20 demanded more energetic efforts to carry out the original aims

At the end of March and the beginning of April the Fronts operating in the western direction tried to carry out these orders demanding the rout of the enemy forces in the Rzhev-Gzhatsk area, but without success

Finally, the GHQ had to accept our proposal for assuming the defensive on the Velikiye Luki-Velizh-Demidov-Bely-Dukhovshchina-Dnieper-Nelidovo-Rzhev-Pogoreloye Gorodishche-Ugra-Spas-Demensk-Kirov-Lyudinovo-Kholmishchi-Oka line

In the course of the winter offensive, the forces of the Western Front had advanced some 50-60 miles and somewhat improved the general strategic position to the west of Moscow

The general results of the offensive had a good effect on the morale of the Soviet troops and dispirited the enemy

Describing the Battle of Moscow, General Westphal had to admit that the German Army, hitherto regarded as invincible, was within an ace of annihilation This is also admitted by other Generals of Hitler s army–Tippelskirch, Blumentritt, Bayerlein, Manteuffel, and many others

There s no getting away from the truth In the Battle of Moscow nazi losses totalled over half a million men, 1,300 tanks, 2,500 guns, over 15,000 lorries and a great deal of further equipment besides The Germans had been thrown back to between 95 and 190 miles from the capital

The 1941-1942 winter counter-offensive was conducted in harsh winter conditions against a numerically superior enemy Moreover,

our armoured and motorised units were under-strength and unable to carry out large-scale offensive operations with decisive objectives Only with the support of powerful tank and motorised units is it possible to forestall the enemy s manoeuvres, rapidly outflank him cut his lines of retreat, and encircle and cut off his armies

In the Battle of Moscow the Red Army inflicted the first major defeat on the enemy s main forces in the six months of war Prior to that our Armed Forces had carried out several important operations that had slowed down the Wehrmacht s advance in the direction of its three main drives yet none had been on such a scale or had such far-reaching results as the battle on the doorstep of the Soviet capital

The skilfully conducted defensive battles successful counter-attacks and the swift counter-offensive had demonstrated the greatly advanced strategical and tactical maturity of the Soviet military leaders and the improved combat skill of the soldiers of all arms

The defeat of the German forces at Moscow had an important international impact The working people in all the countries of the anti-nazi alliance were overjoyed by the news of this outstanding triumph of Soviet arms, and progressives everywhere pinned on it their hopes of deliverance from nazi enslavement

The set-backs suffered by the Germans at Leningrad and Rostov in the Tikhvin area and near Moscow, had a sobering effect on reactionary circles in Japan and Turkey, and forced them to adopt a more cautious policy towards the Soviet Union

The Germans assumed the defensive In an attempt to restore their striking efficiency the nazi military and political leadership was obliged to carry out all sorts of urgent measures involving the transfer to the Soviet Union of a large number of units from France and the other occupied countries They had to resort to pressure on the satellite governments and demand new units and additional material requisitions for the Soviet-German front thereby worsening the political climate within those countries

After the German defeat at Moscow, many German officers and generals not to mention the soldiers, became convinced of the might of the Soviet state, of the fact that the Soviet Armed Forces represented an insuperable barrier to the achievement of the aims of nazism

I am frequently asked about Stalin s role in the Battle of Moscow

Stalin remained in Moscow the whole time organising the forces and equipment for the defeat of the enemy One must give him his due As head of the State Defence Committee, with the help

of the leading workers of the People s Commissariats, he did a colossal job organising the necessary strategic reserves and the materiel By his relentless strictness one might say he achieved the almost impossible

When people ask me what it is I remember best about the last war, I always say the Battle of Moscow

In tough, and often extremely grave conditions, our troops hardened and gained experience and, on receiving a bare minimum of the necessary equipment, from the recoiling, resisting armies became a formidable offensive force Grateful posterity will never forget the tremendous organising work carried on by the Party, the heroic labour exploits of the Soviet people in that period, or the feats of arms of the military

While expressing my deep-felt gratitude to all who took part in the battle and survived it, I bow my head to the bright memory of those who gave their lives to prevent the enemy from reaching the heart of our Country, the hero-city of Moscow We are all, every one of us, boundlessly indebted to them

Konstantin Rokossovsky

Marshal Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovsky was born in Warsaw in 1896 the son of an engine driver He joined the Red Army in 1918 and proved himself a brave and capable officer He was to show his great ability to the full during the Great Patriotic War when he distinguished himself in the Battle of Smolensk and was commander of one of the four sectors of the Western Front in the Battle of Moscow As Commander of the Don Front at Stalingrad Marshal Rokossovsky accepted the capitulation of Field Marshal Paulus Later he commanded the armies of the lst and 2nd Byelorussian Fronts and was one of the authors of the plan for routing the German Heeresgruppe Mitte (Army Group Centre) in Byelorussia In 1949 in compliance with a request from the President of the Polish People s Republic Marshal Rokossovsky assumed the post of Poland s Minister of National Defence From 1956 he was Deputy Minister of Defence of the Soviet Union and held other important military posts Marshal Rokossovsky died in 1968 and was buried by the Kremlin Wall an honour reserved for those who have rendered outstanding service to the Soviet state

Marshal Rokossovsky received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union (twice) the Order of Victory–the highest Soviet military award–and the Order of Builder of People s Poland the highest award of the Polish People s Republic

He was a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1919

THE VOLOKOLAMSK DIRECTION

In July 1941, the nazi command started preparations for their "decisive attack in the central Moscow direction

It was intended to use for this operation the large forces of Army Group Centre Its task was to split the troops of our Western Front at several points encircle and destroy its main forces in the area of Smolensk and open the way to Moscow

The German command did not doubt that these plans would be rapidly fulfilled confident that the Soviet command had no reserves However, the hitlerites miscalculated

The German offensive launched on July 10, though at first successful, was soon checked on the Andreapol-Western Dvina-Zharkovsky-Yartsevo-Yelnya-Desna line The enemy s attempt to complete the encirclement of the 16th and 20th Armies fighting in the area of Smolensk was frustrated by a counter-attack of the Soviet troops from the Yartsevo line which enabled the 16th and 20th Armies to withdraw and take up new defensive positions

At the end of July, the 16th Army joined the units operating in the area of Yartsevo Soon afterwards I was put in command of this Army

In August and September the fighting on the Yartsevo line was of local importance In the first half of August the troops of the 16th Army reached the eastern bank of the Vop River

All enemy attempts to dislodge our troops were repelled Early in September units of the 16th Army forced the Vop under strong enemy fire, stormed and captured the enemy positions on the western bank By eight days of stubborn fighting our Army diverted part of the enemy reserves from the Yelnya area

In the fighting our men became hardened, acquired the necessary combat experience, and learned the weak and strong points of the

enemy Our troops were gaining confidence in their ability not only to resist the enemy, but also to deliver hard counter-blows

This came particularly to the fore during the great Battle of Moscow where I happened to command the 16th Army fighting in the Volokolamsk direction

It so happened that in the middle of October only the 16th Army Staff, without any troops, arrived in the Volokolamsk area On October 5 I had been ordered by the Western Front Command immediately to turn over the sector held by the 16th Army on the Yartsevo line together with the troops to Lieutenant-General Yershakov, Commander of the 20th Army, and with my Army Command and the necessary communications to arrive not later than the morning of October 6 in Vyazma where I was to assume command of other units in order to stem the enemy advance We arrived in Vyazma to find that the troops of which I was to assume command were not there

As a result of the encirclement of large forces of the Western and Reserve Fronts near Vyazma we found ourselves in a distressing situation The Party the Government the Supreme Command and the whole country had to exert titanic efforts to eliminate the danger threatening the capital The Soviet people showed what they were capable of in time of danger Everything was done to check the enemy s advance and hold him back from Moscow

On October 10, 1941, the GHQ appointed General Zhukov Commander of the Western Front I was at the command post of the Western Front when Voroshilov presented the new commander to us

I had known Zhukov for a long time

To my mind he has always been a very strong dedicated man intelligent, capable and exacting He possessed all the qualities so necessary to a military leader True, he was sometimes excessively rigid Somewhat forestalling the events I must observe that at the height of the Moscow fighting our Front Commander was at times, in my opinion, unjustifiably harsh

On October 11, Zhukov ordered the 16th Army to take over the Mozhaisk Combat Zone But no sooner had we done so than we received new orders to transfer the Command and Staff of the 16th Army and the 18th Division of the People s Volunteer Corps (by that time renamed the 18th Infantry Division) to the Volokolamsk area and organise defences in the zone from the Volga Reservoir in the north to Ruza in the south

Towards evening on October 14, we arrived in Volokolamsk and started organising the defences The situation we found there

resembled that on the Yartsevo line in July But in Yartsevo I had arrived with only a small group of officers whom I did not even know at first and without any communications whereas now in October I had a well-knit staff capable of swiftly establishing communications with the troops and organising control The Staff headed by General Malinin had already gone through the hard school of war and had acquired valuable experience The Political Department headed by Romanov was equally good It consisted of stalwart Communists who could lead the Party and Komsomol organisations in performing the assigned missions and inspire the fighting men to heroic exploits All this was to play an enormously important role in the subsequent fighting

After establishing our command post in Volokolamsk we immediately dispatched groups of staff and political officers in all directions in order to establish contact with the troops already in the area, units arriving from the rear and units groups and individuals coming out of encirclement

The first to arrive in the area north of Volokolamsk was the cavalry corps composed of two divisions under the command of General Dovator The corps was assigned to the 16th Army

General Dovator s Cavalry Corps although quite depleted, still presented a formidable force Its men had already engaged in many a battle Its commanders and political instructors had already acquired combat experience and had learned the strong and weak points of the enemy Particularly valuable under those conditions was the high mobility of the corps, which made it possible to use it for manoeuvres in threatened directions (with proper support, of course, since cavalry alone is of little effect against armoured units) This was very important because the enemy s armoured and motorised troops made him highly mobile which was one of his chief advantages

General Dovator made a good impression on me He was young and vivacious, but thoughtful and very competent The fact that he had managed to bring his corps from the enemy rear battle-ready alone testified to the General s talent and determination There could be no doubt that the corps would carry out any mission assigned to it And it was given a very hard mission indeed to organise defences on a wide front north of Volokolamsk, all the way to the Volga Reservoir

North-west of Volokolamsk and to the left of Dovator s cavalry corps defensive positions were taken up by a regiment formed from cadets of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Military Academy, under the command of Colonel Mladentsev with Slavkin as its Com-

missar The regiment organised defences along the eastern bank of the Lama River Despite the tense situation the cadets were in high spirits

The 316th Infantry Division that had arrived from the Front reserve started organising the defences on the left flank, covering Volokolamsk in the west and south-west down to the Ruza River Its commander was General Panfilov and Yegorov its Commissar It was for the first time since the beginning of the war that we had seen an infantry division so up to strength and so well equipped It had good commanders and its political instructors were active Kazakh Party and Government members The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan had considerably helped in the formation of the division

On October 14, I met General Panfilov and we discussed the main questions concerning the imminent battle That it was imminent we did not doubt for a moment

My meeting with General Panfilov convinced me that he was a commander with a profound knowledge of military matters and extensive practical experience He produced a very good impression He had an open, frank and even somewhat shy face At the same time one was struck by his ebullient energy and his ability when necessary to display an iron will and tremendous staying-power He spoke of his subordinates with great respect and it was clear he knew each of them very well I also liked the General s wit Appraising the sector of the defences taken up by one of his regiments he said "Yes, here we must peg away And this perfectly summed up the state of readiness of the so-called fortified zone, for instead of fortifications there were only pegs marking the spot where they were intended to be Not that it was any better in other sectors We therefore made every effort to organise at least field-type defences before the beginning of the enemy offensive

On the basis of our terrain estimate we felt that the main enemy attack was most likely to come on the left flank of the 316th Division Both the divisional and army commands did all they could under the circumstances to fortify this sector

We were particularly careful to organise anti-tank defences in depth The enemy, we knew, was staking mainly on his overwhelming superiority in tanks, and we decided to employ against them all the artillery we had in our army But we did not have enough artillery either, and therefore envisioned extensive manoeuvring We planned in advance the transfer of artillery to threatened sectors, determining the routes

To each artillery battery and separate gun attached to the infantry or dismounted cavalry to fight the tanks, units of infantry or cavalry were assigned as protection against the enemy tommy-gunners These units were subordinated to the commander of the battery or gun which they were protecting This innovation, first introduced in our 16th Army, was based on our combat experience and was subsequently to prove fully justified

We also organised mobile (in motor vehicles or horse-drawn carts) detachments of sappers with mines and demolition charges to fight the enemy tanks They were supposed to mine the areas where tank attacks were most likely and in the course of fighting to block the way to tanks penetrating into the depth of our defences To strengthen the defences at the junctions and intervals between the regiments, anti-tank ditches were dug and mined Thus the 1075th Regiment of the 316th Division covered its left flank with a $2\frac{1}{2}$ mile anti-tank ditch and planted 4,000 mines there

Fortifications stretching for some 60 miles were being hastily built all along the defence zone of the 16th Army–from the Volga Reservoir to Ruza

I feel I should mention the very important role General Kazakov our Artillery Commander, and his subordinates played in organising the anti-tank defences They were with the troops day and night, teaching the unit commanders to use all types of artillery, including AA guns and *Katyusha* rocket launchers, in fighting the tanks As a matter of fact, all the other staff and political instructors, commanders of the different arms and services as well as A A Lobachov, Member of the War Council, and myself spent all our time with the troops

The commanders and political instructors contributed a great deal in those days to raising the morale of the fighting men and inspiring each and everyone of them to defend their positions without ever a thought of withdrawing The knowledge that we were entrusted with defending the approaches to Moscow seemed to give us ten times our normal strength The fighting men vowed to do their utmost to defeat the enemy The stories told by refugees from the nazi-occupied territories about the outrages and atrocities perpetrated by the invaders upon the civilian population and prisoners of war intensified the soldiers hatred for the enemy and strengthened their determination to do or die

The 16th Army was given considerable help in strengthening its defences by the Moscow Party organisation In October 1941 the Muscovites formed dozens of destroyer companies and battalions which reinforced the ranks of the Army units depleted in the

incessant and intense fighting One day, I remember V N Romanchenko, Chief of the Moscow City Militia, telephoned me and asked if I could use a detachment of militia I told him we were badly in need of men Soon a large and very well-equipped detachment consisting of volunteers—workers of the Moscow Militia—arrived in Volokolamsk We used this detachment for actions in the enemy rear, and it rendered us invaluable services

Our units were visited by a group of functionaries from the Central Committee of the Party headed by Yemelyan Yaroslavsky prominent historian and publicist, groups of Moscow actors and writers and delegations from the plants and factories of Moscow and the collective farms of the region The concern displayed by the Muscovites for the fighting men inspired them to new heroic exploits

The state of affairs in the 16th Army was very closely watched by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Joseph Stalin It goes without saying that his personal concern meant a great deal to those for whom it was shown

I remember, one nigth—I think it was already during the fierce fighting in the Istra sector—I had just returned from the forward lines, when I was told that the Commander of the 16th Army was wanted on the phone by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief Stalin asked me about the situation in our zone While reporting on the state of affairs, I tried simultaneously to tell him about my plans for countering the enemy He stopped me, however, and said that I did not have to tell him about my plans, thereby emphasising his confidence in the Army Command At the end of our conversation Stalin asked if we were having a hard time of it and, upon receiving an affirmative answer, said that he was aware of it that he wanted us to hold out a little longer and that he would help us The following morning, as had been promised a guards rocket regiment, two anti-tank artillery regiments, 400 men with anti-tank rifles and three armoured battalions reported to my Army Moscow had sent additional reinforcements—more than 2 000 men

On the morning of October 16 the German mobile armoured and motorised units launched an attack on the left flank of the 16th Army, just where we had expected In this sector alone the hitlerites had concentrated four divisions—two infantry and two Panzer divisions with more than 200 tanks The main attack was delivered at the forward defence line of the 316th Infantry Division 8 to 10 miles from the Volokolamsk Highway

Our troops put up stubborn resistance The nazis threw in strong armoured groups—30-50 panzers each—accompanied by dense infan-

battalion of 85-mm anti-tank guns They set several German tanks on fire and the attack petered out We had to leave Liyalovo, which was being heavily shelled and move to Kryukovo

After the nazi troops had reached the area of Liyalovo the Command of the Western Front reinforced us, in response to our insistent requests, with one greatly depleted tank brigade, an infantry regiment, a cavalry regiment, a cannon and anti-tank artillery regiments This list is enough to show that by that time the Front Command had no reserves either It had to do what we did in our Army, namely, take part of the forces from one sector and transfer them to another

The defences of the 16th Army stretched out like a thread could snap at almost any time We had to rack our brains to prevent this, and wherever there was a break we had to find some ways and means of patching it up

Upon receiving the new reinforcements we made an attempt, on orders from the Front Command to counter-attack the enemy group that had broken through to the area of Liyalovo We managed to check the enemy advance for a time

We all knew that the enemy offensive was petering out and that we had only to hang on for a little longer The GHQ was having reserves brought up to Moscow Command of the Western Front was also doing all it could to reinforce the fighting troops at least a little, without committing the fresh reserves to action, but withholding them for the decisive moment

One night at the end of November when I was at my command post in Kryukovo I was summoned to the telephone by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief He asked me if I knew that enemy units had appeared in the area of Krasnaya Polyana and what was being done to keep them out of there Stalin particularly emphasised that from there the nazis could start using long-range artillery to shell the capital I told him I knew that enemy advance units had reached the area north of Krasnaya Polyana and that we had already transferred troops there from other sectors Stalin told me that GHQ had ordered this sector to be reinforced by the troops of the Moscow Defence Zone

Soon General Sokolovsky, the Front Chief of Staff, informed me that a tank brigade, an artillery regiment and four battalions of *Katyusha* rocket launchers had been detached from the Front reserve to reinforce the 16th Army and to mount a counter-attack We were also to receive two of the Army s infantry battalions with an artillery regiment and two artillery regiments from the GHQ Reserves I ordered General Kazakov, Commander of the Artillery,

try formations with artillery and air support Upon encountering well-organised resistance the nazis withdrew, but soon attacked again Heavy losses forced them to commit new forces all the time On October 17 the enemy engaged units of Dovator s cavalry corps north of Volokolamsk The same day fierce fighting broke out near Bolychev at the junction with the 5th Army Against one of the regiments of the 316th Division the enemy hurled close on 100 tanks and forcing our units back managed to capture two villages In an attempt to exploit their success in depth the nazis put on extra pressure at this point but ran into our artillery, which we had hurriedly brought up to the threatened area from other sectors Suffering heavy losses in armour, the enemy withdrew The hitlerites were no more successful in the sector defended by our dismounted cavalry, where all attacks were likewise repulsed

We, too, suffered heavy losses in these battles Our troops–artillerymen, infantry engineers and signalmen–displayed mass heroism and stood to the death in repelling the enemy onslaught The infantry fought the panzers with grenades and incendiary bottles The infantrymen covering the artillery died together with the gun crews rather than abandoning them The latter went on firing even from damaged guns The signalmen repaired telephone lines under withering enemy fire

Each day of the fighting for Moscow brought new examples of the Soviet soldiers heroism and defiance of death Junior Lieutenant Shirmatov was behind a light machine-gun He could see the attacking nazis perfectly well, but he waited for he knew that the closer they came the more deadly would the fire of his machine-gun be Then when only 250 to 300 yards separated him from the enemy he opened fire, killing more than 50 nazi officers and men The rest fled in panic, the hero shouting after them Who else wants Moscow?

The fighting went on without pause, attacks following each other in rapid succession While active along the entire front the enemy was pressing particularly hard in the Volokolamsk sector where he continually committed new units to action Enjoying considerable superiority, the Germans gradually pressed our troops back, mile after mile They strove to drive a powerful tank spearhead into our lines and break through to the Volokolamsk Highway Their attacks were given continuous air support

By October 25, the enemy captured Bolychev and Ostashev, forced the Ruza River, and throwing in close to 125 tanks, seized the Volokolamsk railway station

In the fighting for Volokolamsk and to the east of it the 316th Division with its artillery units and the Cadet Regiment covered themselves with eternal glory These troops prevented the enemy despite his great numerical superiority, from making any further headway The enemy suffered enormous losses, especially in armour and was forced to take a respite in order to redeploy and bring up fresh forces

Recalling the events of those days I can say with pride in the troops I commanded that in the fighting of October 16-27 every man did all he could to prevent a breach in our Army s defences They did their duty, and their Country reveres their immortal exploit

Exhausted from the ferocious battles at Volokolamsk and north of it the nazis discontinued their offensive There followed a relative lull for a few days According to reports from reconnaissance and our soldiers coming out of the enemy rear, the nazi command had tested the strength of our defences and decided to organise a new blow For this purpose fresh forces were being concentrated in the Volokolamsk-Istra direction, while other forces were being deployed further north

During those days General Boldin broke out of encirclement accompanied by several officers and soldiers and came to us From him we learned about the fate of the troops of the Western and Reserve Fronts–the 19th, 20th, 24th and 32nd Armies, including the troops of the 16th Army which we had transferred to the 20th Army on October 5 and which were encircled west of Vyazma Many units, after losing contact with their staffs, divided into groups and tried to make their way through the enemy lines and rejoin our forces Boldin himself and a few of his officers and soldiers had also made their way east through the woods For a while wounded General Lukin, Commander of the 19th Army, was with them But one night their group was suddenly attacked by German tommy-gunners, and they all had to scatter and try to break through singly It was during that tragic night that they lost General Lukin Subsequently we learned that, severely wounded he had been taken prisoner General Boldin left us and went to Moscow and soon became famous for the heroic defence of Tula at the head of the 50th Army

Meanwhile the situation at the front was becoming increasingly grave Reconnaissance reported that the enemy was redeploying his troops and was concentrating large forces in the Volokolamsk direction and on the right flank of the 16th Army His offensive was to be expected any day Meanwhile we were trying to fortify

our positions as best we could At the end of October and the beginning of November the hitlerites captured a number of villages including Skirmanovo on our left flank and were threatening the main Volokolamsk-Istra Road From this position they not only kept this road under artillery fire, but might at any time cut it and come out in the rear of the main group of the 16th Army in this direction

We decided to forestall this threat by recapturing Skirmanovo This mission was assigned to the 50th Cavalry Division under General Pliyev the 18th Infantry Division whose command was assumed by Colonel Chernyshov in November, and Colonel Katukov s Tank Brigade that had just arrived but had already engaged the enemy and had suffered heavy losses We also threw in several artillery units and mortar battalions

The forthcoming operation was carefully devised and planned An active part in preparing the operation was taken by G N Oryol, Commander of the 16th Army Armoured Troops A A Lobachov Member of the War Council and P Y Maximenko Commander of the 16th Army Communications It should be noted that in anticipation of a new enemy offensive we were taking a big chance in launching this operation but we had no alternative We were however somewhat reassured by the fact that the cavalry divisions arriving from Central Asia were being brought up to the right flank of the Army

The fighting for Skirmanovo lasted from November 11 to November 14 and was most successful Our artillery and mortars and well-aimed *Katyusha* volleys inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, and well-coordinated infantry attacks supported by tanks completed the operation

Much credit for the success of the operation was due to a strong group of tommy-gunners who had penetrated the enemy rear the night before the attack, and part of the 50th Cavalry Division that turned the enemy flank almost cutting into their rear The nazi troops in Skirmanovo and the neighbouring villages were completely routed The 10th Panzer Division, whose aim was to seize the Volokolamsk-Moscow Highway, was hurled far back with heavy losses The threat to the highway was thus removed

The nazis left behind close to 50 crippled and burnt-out tanks, many guns, including 150-mm ones a large number of mortars machine-guns and motor vehicles The prisoners taken in this battle were sent to Moscow

However, severe new trials were in store for us The decisive moment in the battle for the capital came in the middle of Novem-

ber On the morning of November 16, the enemy resumed its offensive along the entire front opposite the 16th Army It was immediately clear where the enemy was delivering its main attack on the left flank of the Army, i e , again in the Volokolamsk area defended by the 316th Infantry Division and the Cadet Regiment

The attack opened with a heavy artillery barrage and bombing raids Shrieking dive-bombers dropped their bombs on our infantry and artillery positions

After a while the enemy tanks advanced in groups of 15-30 accompanied by dense formations of tommy-gunners Lobachov and I watched the developments from the observation post of General Panfilov, Commander of the 316th Division, where we happened to be when the battle began

The battle was exceptionally ferocious from the very outset Despite our artillery fire, some of the enemy tanks managed to reach our trenches where they met with fierce resistance

The units of the 316th Infantry Division, supported by artillery and tanks, although we still had very few of them, were stubbornly repelling the attacking nazis Our quadruple machine-guns and 37-mm AA guns kept up a barrage of deadly fire at the dive-bombers and many of the nazi vultures were brought down in smoke and flames

The picture of the battle and the behaviour of our troops firmly convinced me that the enemy would not break through to Moscow

In this battle I came to know General Panfilov and his men still better The General controlled his troops confidently, firmly and intelligently If things get really desperate for him, I thought, I shall only have to help him with fresh reinforcements and he ll know how to use them without any prompting It was with this conviction that we left his observation post Lobachov went to the Cadet Regiment where heavy fighting was also in progress, while I went to my command post in Ustinovo

On our way we were twice attacked by enemy planes car-hunting along the Volokolamsk-Moscow Highway From the thunder of the artillery I knew that fighting had also broken out in the sector of the 18th Infantry Division

On November 17 the enemy continued its offensive throwing in more and more fresh units By that time the muddy ground had frozen over and the nazi armoured and motorised units–their main striking force–had a much freer hand The tanks were now moving across country When the enemy could not by-pass our defences he concentrated large tank groups supported by strong artillery and mortar fire and dive-bomber raids to break through them

We responded by moving around roving batteries and separate guns and tanks Our sappers helped greatly in these manoeuvres provided with transport, they went around planting mines and ground bombs We encouraged all and any initiative displayed by our fighting men

The nazis shed plenty of their blood on every inch of our ground but they were still strong and continued their efforts to break through to Moscow

By November 18 our left flank was already being attacked by four armoured divisions (2nd 11th 5th and 10th), the Reich motorised division and units of the 252nd Infantry Division The enemy managed to press the right-flank units of the 5th Army a considerable way back and throwing in fresh forces, advanced rapidly in the gap that had formed between the armies, thereby threatening to outflank the 16th Army The nazis broke through to the Volokolamsk-Moscow Highway, threatening to cut it

It was at this critical moment that Beloborodov s 78th Siberian Infantry Division was given the task of counter-attacking the nazi troops breaking through towards the highway The division swiftly deployed and attacked the Germans flank, overrunning them and hurling them back It was a powerful blow that saved the situation In their elan the men of the division furiously pursued the enemy, and the nazis were only able to stem their advance by bringing up new units

Heavy fighting also raged in the other sectors of the front defended by the 16th Army With their vast numerical superiority, great mobility and continuous air support, the enemy formed striking groups in the course of the battle and attacked now in one and now in another sector In each of these instances, lacking sufficient reserves for defence in depth, we had to remove part of our forces from some sectors and transfer them to others, where the danger was greater We were gradually being forced back

In the three days of incessant fighting our units had in some places retreated 3 to 5 miles, but the enemy failed to breach our defences at any point

The heroic deeds of Panfilov s 316th Infantry Division, Dovator s Cavalry Corps, and Katukov s and Remizov's Armoured Brigades, which repelled the onslaught of the enemy Panzer units on November 16 will never be forgotten

When the enemy tried to drive a powerful Panzer spearhead at the junction between our 316th Division and the cavalry group $4^{1}/_{2}$ miles south-east of Volokolamsk he met with fierce resistance from the anti-tank units of the 1075th Infantry Regiment At the

railway siding of Dubosekovo 28 men of the Panfilov Division under political instructor Klochkov met an attack of 50 panzers and for four hours fought an unparalleled battle I cannot help recalling the now famous words uttered by Klochkov Russia is vast but there is nowhere to retreat, for behind us is Moscow That was the thought of every fighting man, and they all stood their ground to the death at the gates of capital One by one they were wounded and killed The severely wounded political instructor rushed at an enemy tank with a bunch of hand-grenades and blew it up The Germans left 18 tanks and scores of soldiers and officers on the battlefield, but failed to break through

In those days we suffered a very heavy loss Major-General Panfilov was killed at his observation post

In the three days of fighting the nazis came to realise that they could not possibly breach our defences in the Volokolamsk sector for which reason, while continuing their attacks and slowly pressing our units back about a mile and a half a day they started preparing for a breakthrough south of the Volga Reservoir Their decision was apparently due to the fact that their units advancing along the northern bank of the reservoir managed to capture a railway bridge and come out on the Moscow-Leningrad Highway

Continuing to press our units back on the left flank the enemy made a hasty assault crossing of the Istra River and captured bridgeheads on the eastern bank South of the Volga Reservoir the enemy breached our defences in the sector of the 30th Army and his armoured and motorised units swiftly advanced east widening the gap and turning the flank, cutting into the rear of the 126th Infantry Division which was holding defences on our right flank and doing its utmost to check the enemy advance Simultaneously the enemy delivered a blow in the Solnechnogorsk direction By throwing in infantry, armoured and motorised units from the area of Teryaeva Sloboda, the enemy started advancing in the direction of Solnechnogorsk by-passing the Istra Reservoir to the north

A very grave situation developed in the Klin and Solnechnogorsk directions where the nazi command threw in six divisions–three armoured (6th, 7th and 2nd), two infantry (106th and 35th) and one motorised (14th) Fighting in this area were our 107th Motorised Infantry, 126th Infantry, 17th Cavalry and 58th Armoured Divisions and the 25th Armoured Brigade All these troops had been severely weakened in heavy fighting so that the enemy had great superiority in numbers Suffice it to say that the 107th Motorised Infantry Division numbered only about 300 effectives, the

58th Armoured Division had 15 light tanks and the 25th Armoured Brigade 12 only four of them T-34s With this overwhelming superiority the enemy advanced rapidly towards Klin, by-passing the units of the 16th Army holding defences in the north

Despite the heroic resistance of General Zakharov s troops the Germans captured Klin on the morning of November 24 Their attempts to advance swiftly east in the direction of Dmitrov however met with stubborn and well-organised resistance In the Solnechnogorsk direction the enemy pressed back the Cadet Regiment by-passed the Istra Reservoir and having captured Solnechnogorsk moved south on Moscow In the Istra direction our troops were also forced to withdraw at some points even to the eastern bank of the Istra River Nevertheless all the enemy s efforts to breach our defences failed The heroism of the men of all units–infantry artillery tank mortar and cavalry–checked the German advance and by well-organised defence and counter-attacks inflicted heavy losses on the enemy

In those critical days the Army hardly had any reserves to draw on Meantime great danger was threatening us in the area of Solnechnogorsk and we were forced to concentrate there troops taken from other sectors thereby seriously weakening them The 289th and 296th Anti-tank and 138th Artillery Regiments formerly intended for reinforcing the Klin direction were deployed at Solnechnogorsk and took up positions Dovator s cavalry corps reinforced by two reserve tank battalions and two infantry battalions from the 8th Guards Division were also sent there We decided to establish a temporary Army command post in the village of Peshki and transfer our main HQ to Liyalovo

We arrived in the village of Peshki towards evening on November 24 From the report of a staff officer we learned that north of the village there were only a few units from General Revyakin s group, ordered by the Front Commander to defend Solnechnogorsk and a few tanks The units of the 16th Army had not yet reached the areas I had assigned them to

There was no time to take stock of the situation The enemy had started a heavy artillery and mortar bombardment One of the shells hit our house and went through the wall but, luckily did not explode An officer came running into the house and reported that nazi tanks had entered the village along the highway followed by tommy-gunners who fired right and left at every house

We had never been in such a fine mess We had left our cars on the outskirts of the village In the street shells whizzed over

our heads They dropped on the ground or hit buildings or fences but did not explode They were apparently duds fired by nazi tankmen

We split up–there were about 15 of us–and keeping only a short distance apart so as not to lose sight of each other made our way to the ravine at the end of the village There we found our cars–the drivers had not abandoned us in our misfortune We decided to drive directly to Army HQ and thence direct the troops which were being concentrated in the Solnechnogorsk direction

In Liyalovo, where our main command post was located, M S Malinin reported that the Front Staff had already inquired several times whether or not the troops of the 16th Army had assumed the offensive at Solnechnogorsk It so happened that the Front Command had changed the task I had assigned to the troops removed from the Istra positions, now, instead of holding defences at Solnechnogorsk they were to attack and drive the enemy out of the town But the troops learned about the new task when they were already on the way to Solnechnogorsk There was no time to properly organise the attack and it was launched immediately the 50th Cavalry Division with two armoured battalions advancing towards Martynovo, Selishchevo and Cherni, and the 44th and 53rd Cavalry Divisions advancing towards Solnechnogorsk from the south-west and south-east respectively

At first the attack succeeded in the area of Sverchkovo, Selishchevo and Martynovo the 50th Cavalry Division routed the 240th Infantry Regiment Our other units also made some progress, but were then stopped and hurled back to their original positions The enemy managed to bring up sufficient forces to the area of Solnechnogorsk to repel all the attempts of Dovator s group (he had been ordered to command this attack) to drive the enemy out of Solnechnogorsk

All of us, from soldier to Army Commander, felt that the decisive days had come and that we had to hold out at all costs Our troops gave their all

The nazis were noticeably in a hurry and were committing their last reserves to action And, although, thanks to their superiority, they continued to press our troops back, it could already be seen that the climax of the battle was approaching

Meanwhile, we were being forced to move our command post closer to Moscow When we had established ourselves in Liyalovo fighting with the enemy tanks broke out on its north-eastern outskirts Everybody who happened to be in that area, including the Army Staff officers, took part in the fighting We were saved by a

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battalion of 85-mm anti-tank guns. They set several German tanks on fire and the attack petered out. We had to leave Liyalovo, which was being heavily shelled, and move to Kryukovo.

After the nazi troops had reached the area of Liyalovo the Command of the Western Front reinforced us, in response to our insistent requests, with one greatly depleted tank brigade, an infantry regiment, a cavalry regiment, a cannon and anti-tank artillery regiments. This list is enough to show that by that time the Front Command had no reserves either. It had to do what we did in our Army, namely, take part of the forces from one sector and transfer them to another.

The defences of the 16th Army stretched out like a thread could snap at almost any time. We had to rack our brains to prevent this, and wherever there was a break we had to find some ways and means of patching it up.

Upon receiving the new reinforcements we made an attempt, on orders from the Front Command, to counter-attack the enemy group that had broken through to the area of Liyalovo. We managed to check the enemy advance for a time.

We all knew that the enemy offensive was petering out and that we had only to hang on for a little longer. The GHQ was having reserves brought up to Moscow. Command of the Western Front was also doing all it could to reinforce the fighting troops at least a little, without committing the fresh reserves to action, but withholding them for the decisive moment.

One night at the end of November when I was at my command post in Kryukovo I was summoned to the telephone by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. He asked me if I knew that enemy units had appeared in the area of Krasnaya Polyana and what was being done to keep them out of there. Stalin particularly emphasised that from there the nazis could start using long-range artillery to shell the capital. I told him I knew that enemy advance units had reached the area north of Krasnaya Polyana and that we had already transferred troops there from other sectors. Stalin told me that GHQ had ordered this sector to be reinforced by the troops of the Moscow Defence Zone.

Soon General Sokolovsky, the Front Chief of Staff, informed me that a tank brigade, an artillery regiment and four battalions of *Katyusha* rocket launchers had been detached from the Front reserve to reinforce the 16th Army and to mount a counter-attack. We were also to receive two of the Army's infantry battalions with an artillery regiment and two artillery regiments from the GHQ Reserves. I ordered General Kazakov, Commander of the Artillery,

and Lieutenant-Colonel Orel, Commander of the Army s Armoured Troops to assemble and organise the troops for the counter-attack

The organisation of the counter-attack could not be delayed and everything was therefore done in haste The offensive began in the morning Supported by strong artillery and rocket fire our units attacked the enemy before he had time to consolidate his defences The Germans resisted savagely and delivered strong counter-attacks taking advantage of their superiority in tanks and aircraft Towards the end of the day however they were driven out of Krasnaya Polyana and pressed back about three miles

The threat of Moscow s bombardment by long-range artillery was thus removed But immediately after this the situation took a turn for the worse in the Solnechnogorsk area The enemy managed to press our units back to the Klushino-Matushkino-Kryukovo-Barantsevo line We threw in everything we could, but the Army command post had to be withdrawn from Kryukovo Shells and mines exploded in the streets an enemy tank attack was in progress on the northern outskirts and there were continual Luftwaffe raids It should be noted that our aircraft were very active in this battle True the enemy had superiority in the air over the battlefield but nevertheless the appearance of a comparatively large number of our fighters greatly encouraged our ground forces

Ferocious uninterrupted fighting raged all along the front of the 16th Army as well as that of our neighbours on the right and left the 30th and 5th Armies We were hard-pressed everywhere The enemy was making desperate efforts to breach our defences in the sector held by the 16th Army, on the flank closest to Moscow He succeeded in pressing the left flank of our Army back a little further to the Barantsevo-Khovanskoye-Petrovskoye-Lenino line Kryukovo changed hands repeatedly but the enemy was completely exhausted and could advance no farther

Meanwhile the mustering of the GHQ strategic reserves was practically completed Although some units from these reserves had been used during the last few days to reinforce the defences in the particularly threatened sectors of the front, especially in the Yakhroma area the main forces were withheld for the decisive moment That was what in the long run decided the outcome of the Battle of Moscow

The Germans had failed to breach our defences and had completely expended all their reserves The moment had come when the tables were to be turned on the nazis and they were forced to assume the defensive For several days the enemy s attacks were

but an attempt to gain time in order to consolidate their positions near Moscow and hold them at all costs

But the Moscow counter-offensive assumed by the Soviet troops on the decision of the GHQ gave the enemy no time to organise his defences

Without any pause the troops of the 16th Army immediately went over to the offensive In the area of Krasnaya Polyana Liyalovo and Kryukovo the fighting never ceased and was particularly savage near Kryukovo Here the main attack was delivered by units of the 8th Guards Infantry Division (after Panfilov s death its command was assumed by Major-General Revyakin) reinforced by a tank battalion, the 17th Infantry Brigade and the 44th Cavalry Division with two artillery regiments and two *Katyusha* rocket battalions After three days of battle which often developed into hand-to-hand fighting Kryukovo was enveloped to the south-west, and the enemy resistance was broken Our troops captured close to 60 tanks 120 motor vehicles large quantities of arms ammunition and other equipment In the village of Kamenka the enemy abandoned two 300-mm guns intended for shelling Moscow

On December 6 the main forces of the 16th Army also assumed the offensive in the Istra direction

It should be noted that deep snow and severe frosts hindered the Soviet troops in their cross-country manoeuvres aimed at cutting the enemy s withdrawal routes so that the Germans should be grateful to the inclement weather for helping them withdraw from Moscow with smaller losses than would otherwise have been the case rather than blaming the frost for their defeat

While retreating the Germans did all they could to impede our advance They heavily mined the roads set up all kinds of booby traps and burned down all villages before pulling out, mining any of the houses that were left standing both inside and out

I remember how on one occasion Lobachov Malinin several other officers and myself went into a house to warm up Instructions had to be urgently prepared for the next day s operations The house had of course already been demined, as evidenced by piles of mines lying around We were just about to get down to work when several reporters came in with cameras The room was so crowded it was quite impossible to do any work Something had to be done The mines gave me an idea for a little fun On the wall there was an old-fashioned clock with weights suspended from a chain and wrapped in cloth I warned those in the room to keep away from the clock because it was mined Everybody knew that the nazis usually left behind all sorts of booby traps, and naturally

after my warning nobody was very anxious to stay in the room Soon they all left the house, and we were able to get on with our work without offending anybody

After the 1st Shock Army and the 20th Army assigned to the Western Front by GHQ had been brought into the gap between the 16th and 30th Armies, our Army's attacking zone was considerably narrowed down We formed a second echelon to build up attacks where necessary

We were somewhat anxious about one tough obstacle in the path of our offensive drive–the Istra River To prevent the enemy from strengthening his positions on the river, we ordered the troops to immediately make an assault crossing, after forming a group of mobile troops for enveloping the Istra Reservoir to the north and south in the event of the enemy managing to blow up the locks

Fighting was already in progress on the approaches to the Istra line Everything indicated that the enemy's resistance was becoming more stubborn and an assault crossing of the Istra would be impossible We therefore devoted all our attention to the enveloping groups–Remizov s on the right and Katukov's on the left As was expected, the Germans had blown up the reservoir dam The rushing water created enormous difficulties for our troops Under these circumstances the enveloping groups played an extremely important role Their attacks to the north and south greatly facilitated the infantry crossing

Before my very eyes Beloborodov's division crossed the raging stream in a most severe frost and under heavy fire We used everything we could lay our hands on–logs, fences, doors and rubber dingies The Siberian heroes did what seemed almost the impossible, and put the enemy to flight This assault was greatly aided by our glorious artillerymen and machine-gunners who provided covering fire for the infantry during the crossing

After forcing the Istra the troops of the 16th Army continued to fight their way westwards without giving the enemy a chance to stop and organise his defences In order to disengage from our attacking troops and save manpower the retreating enemy had to abandon everything that hampered his flight The roads were cluttered up with arms and equipment tanks, tractors, guns of all calibres, all kinds of motor vehicles, ammunition boxes, innumerable barrels and crates–everything but the kitchen sink Most of the stuff was mined, and so were the roadsides, and this naturally impeded our advance It should be remembered that at that time there was no special equipment to pave the way for columns across country and, especially, over deep snow, while the rather primitive

means the engineers possessed could barely clear the roads To hasten our advance we used ski units, but they could not engage the retreating nazi troops till the arrival of our main forces

The farther away from Moscow the fiercer enemy resistance became From documents that fell into our hands and from prisoners we learned that Hitler had ordered his troops to assume a strategic defensive

But we, too had a hard time of it In the protracted defensive fighting and the subsequent counter-offensive the troops of the 16th Army had suffered heavy casualties The divisions now numbered 1,200-1,500 effectives including artillerymen, mortarmen sappers, signalmen and staff officers there were very few infantry The command and political personnel had also suffered heavy losses The situation was equally grave in the neighbouring armies

Before we approached the line of the Lama and Ruza rivers, the Western Front Command began to use part of the forces of one army to reinforce another in a desperate effort to somehow build up our forces sufficiently to continue the offensive This improvisation did produce some successes but only of local importance When we reached the Lama and Ruza line however, it became perfectly clear that the enemy had managed to recover from the blows he had received, because his defences were becoming increasingly stronger and more organised

Early in January the Red Army counter-offensive came to a halt The enemy had been driven away from Moscow The direct threat to the capital had been completely removed

Ivan Strelbitsky

General Strelbitsky of the Artillery was born i Gorlovka a town in Donetsk Region He served i the Soviet Army for over forty years starting as a cadet and finishing up as a general He was head of the Artillery School in Podolsk near Moscow when the Great Patriotic War began

In October 1941 his cadets together with the cadets of the Podolsk Infantry School put up a valiant resistance to the Germans 57th Motorised Corps and fighting to the last bullet barred the enemy s way to Moscow It is to these young sol diers that General Strelbitsky dedicated his Twelve Days of One Year included in the present collec tion

General Strelbitsky is the author of several books on the history of the Great Patriotic War the best known of which is *Assault*

An Account
of the Heroic Feat
of Military School
Cadets
in the Battle
of Moscow

TWELVE DAYS
OF ONE YEAR

The Junker bombers dropped their loads and disappeared into the west A dirty-grey cloud of smoke hung low for a few minutes over the ground that had been ploughed up by the bombs When it thinned out the flat white shell of the pillbox came into view again

Nazi soldiers who had climbed out of the trenches a quarter of an hour ago to watch their bombers at work stood along the edge of the forest looking at the Soviet pillbox, watching for signs of life

Tanks and infantry stood waiting interspaced with guns (there were about half a dozen brand new ones because all the damaged ones had been pulled back into the rear so as not to discourage the new-arrivals) They were all staring intently at the pillbox The houses of Ilyinskoye village that had shielded it had been burned down to reveal a water meadow with twenty-three gutted tanks and the pillbox beyond a small stream The pillbox was silent The day before it had kept up a lively duel with the German batteries but today its fire was spare Ammunition was evidently running short Its two last shots fired two hours ago had knocked the track off one of the tanks and then set it on fire It was the twenty-third

The German officers hiding behind a tumbled down brick wall of the school building peered at the pillbox through their field-glasses Some of the surviving villagers heard how they tried to persuade an SS tankman to move forward but he simply shook his head Then one of the officers went to the AA battery

Long barrels drooped to the ground Gun layers took careful aim Fire!

Earth and smoke spurted up all round the pillbox, one shell made a direct hit and burst in an orange fireball

An excited murmur arose among the nazis

Again the gun layers glued their eyes to the sights They fired another round of shells and then another They aimed at the dark gaping hole of the embrasure It was like a training practice at a shooting range Fireballs flared up on the bunker s walls Then came a muffled explosion followed by several more The pillbox belched thick black smoke

The nazis gave a roar of delight The SS tankman dived into the forest and almost immediately tanks crawled out into the open They formed a column with infantry following them through the gutted village, across the meadow and towards the stream They advanced unhurriedly, these conquerors of France and Poland yesterday s "heroes ' of Africa dreaming of Moscow They walked across the meadow with the skirts of their greatcoats tucked into their belts Hundreds of highly trained automatons trampled the shell-torn earth and it seemed that no force could stop them

And then there was a shot, a single gun shot It would have gone unnoticed if its effect had not been so devastating The leading nazi tank burst into flames A second shot sent up a geyser of earth by the roadside The column of tanks and the amazed soldiers came to a halt They could hardly believe it Surely, the dead could not fire? Another shot rang out in answer This time from a rifle The Germans knew only too well the sound of the Russian army rifle One of the tommy-gunners, the first to reach the river bank, stumbled and fell headlong into the water

The Russian could not be serious, fighting tanks with a rifle Five seconds later–the time to reload the rifle–another shot sent one more nazi reeling to the ground

"*Vorwärts!* ' roared nazi officers AA guns resumed their direct fire at the bunker, tanks crawled on and smoky stitches of tracers converged on the embrasure

This Happened in October 1941, 80 Miles from Moscow

1

This is not a novel but reminiscences I feel duty bound to relate them Here is why

I have fought in four wars In the last one I went through practically everything I was encircled and broke out, retreated and advanced, fought in battles unparalleled in history But when I am

asked what impressed me most I do not hesitate to say it was those few days in September when a handful of young soldiers halted the units of the German 57th Motorised Corps

A powerful nazi machine was moving with great impetus, a panzer fist of hundreds of modern tanks, everything in their path was ploughed up and destroyed by bombs and shells, they were supported by many thousands of experienced soldiers armed with automatic weapons, all this began to skid when it faced a few outdated guns which could have been counted on one s fingers, old-fashioned Maxim machine-guns and army rifles fifty years old

But miracles do happen The rifles and guns were being wielded by Komsomol boys of Moscow and its region They were the creators of the miracle

I am a veteran and had my first taste of gunpowder in the Civil War I can justly call these boys "sons ' Most of them were 17 and 18 years old and only a few 20, though there were some who had already managed to graduate from technical schools and institutes

I remember September 15th It was one of the hardest days One of the boys came rushing to my command post, excited beyond words, eyes burning, he was waving a German submachine-gun

Comrade commander," he yelled "It's so exciting down there! Tanks are burning! Lots of them! Come and have a look

And he was gone I only remember that his name was Goga I think he realised that if the tank attack had succeeded we would all have died But as soon as it was repelled, he forgot the danger and it was only "Oh, how exciting! Well, it was hard to blame them–they were young boys after all

The few that were not Komsomol members were Communists and they were all cadets of the two Podolsk officer schools artillery and infantry

These future officers of the Soviet Army did not stain the honour of the Russian soldier Even at Hitler's GHQ the Ilyinskoye battle sector was marked on the map as "Zwei Offizierschule* Podolsk'

2

I was put in command of the Podolsk Officer Artillery School a month before the events I am about to relate I had just arrived from the front and had only a vague idea of my new duties I recall how in my very first days in command I was struck by the youth of my cadets Some of them had never shaved, others had never been

* Two officer schools

out to work and there were those who never travelled without their parents

And in three or at the most four months they were to go into battle in command of an artillery platoon They were to match their skill against tanks Would they have enough will power and courage? Would they pick up enough knowledge experience and tact? They were to be placed in command of men much older than themselves

But then I was only eighteen myself when at the height of the Civil War I was taking a course at the artillery school for commanders in Kiev

What could we do in one month? I had already had fighting experience and knew how tanks should be fought in modern warfare But schools taught in an old-fashioned way with particular stress on theory

The first time I came to the firing grounds I was surprised to see that there was only one tank to a gun The picture now was quite different on the battlefield During massed tank attacks there were as many as four or five tanks to a gun Not one of the cadets could cope with the task I gave them to fight off several tanks Two was the most they could engage The rest of the enemy tanks had a chance to crush the guns and their crews

The training programme had to be retailored immediately with stress on firing practice We were given help the best tank destroyers who had distinguished themselves on battlefields were sent to us to teach from their experience which as yet could not be found in any manual

We never had a chance to complete our studies however One fateful evening I received a telephone call from the deputy commander of the military area

Strelbitsky, the general was in a hurry Alert your cadets right away Form up as many batteries as there are guns that can fire Arm the rest of your cadets with rifles and machine-guns

German troops had ripped the Western Front wide open and now large mechanised units were pouring through the gap towards Yukhnov There were no troops either near Yukhnov or between it and Moscow to stop the panzer avalanche

3

The only thing to do was to round up everything that was available and try to contain the enemy at least for five or seven days

Everything available The two Podolsk military schools had to

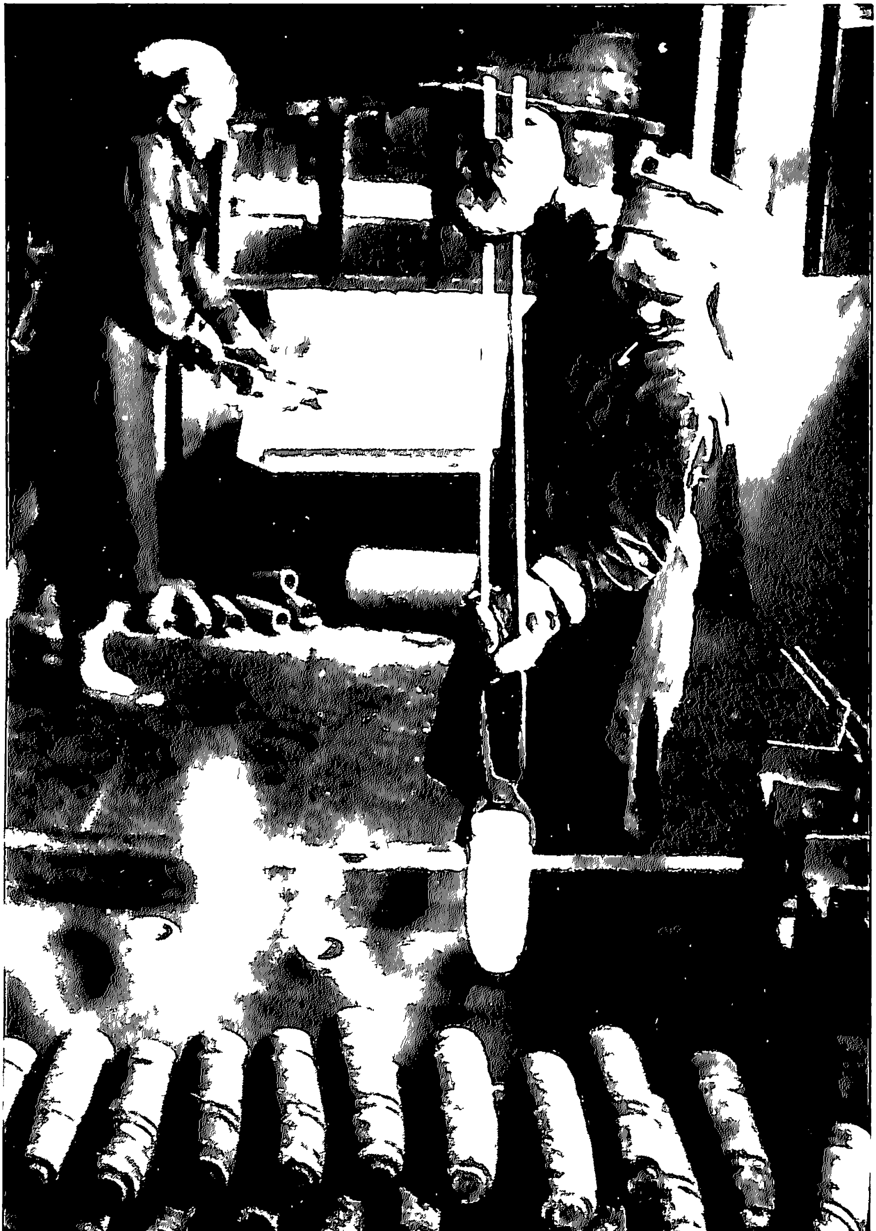


General Georgi Zhukov C-in-C
Western Front

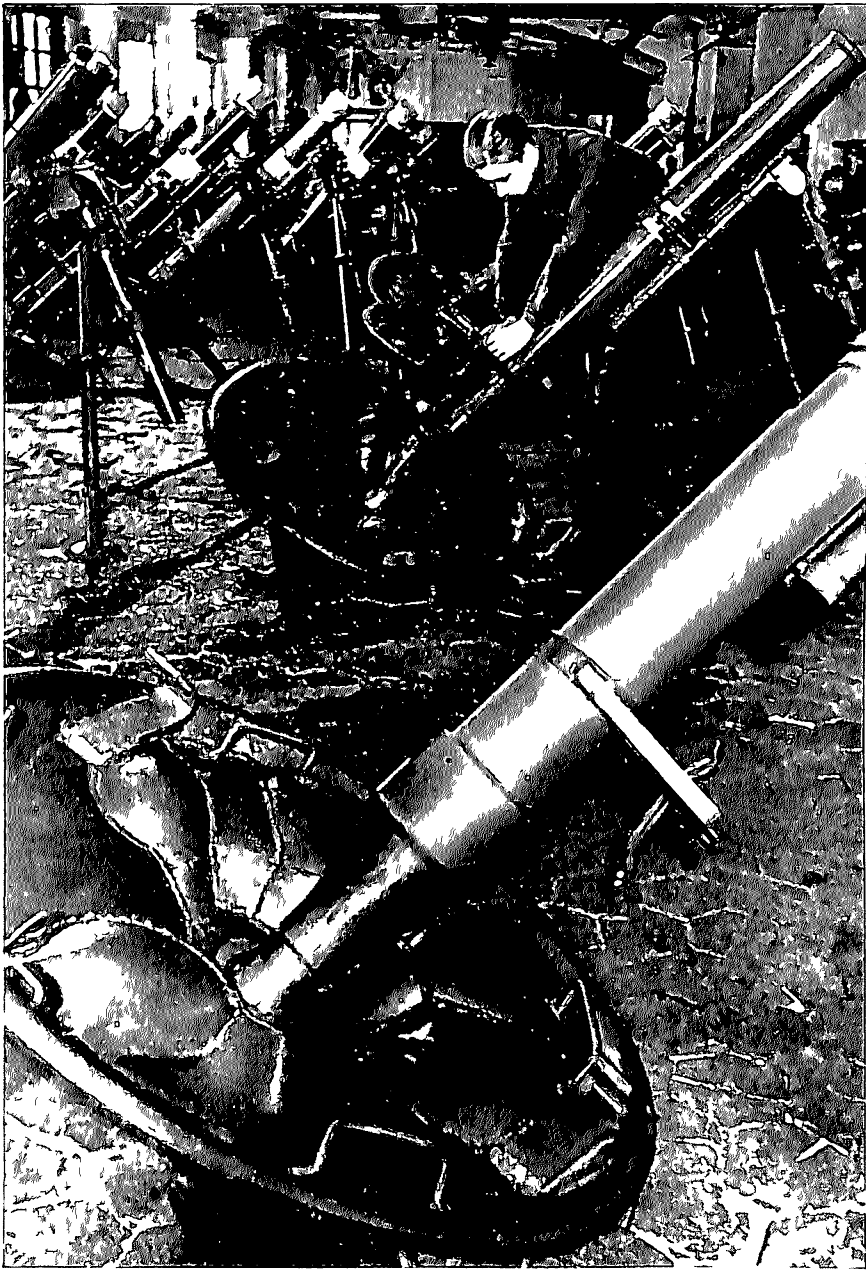


Tanks passing through Moscow on the way to the front 1941

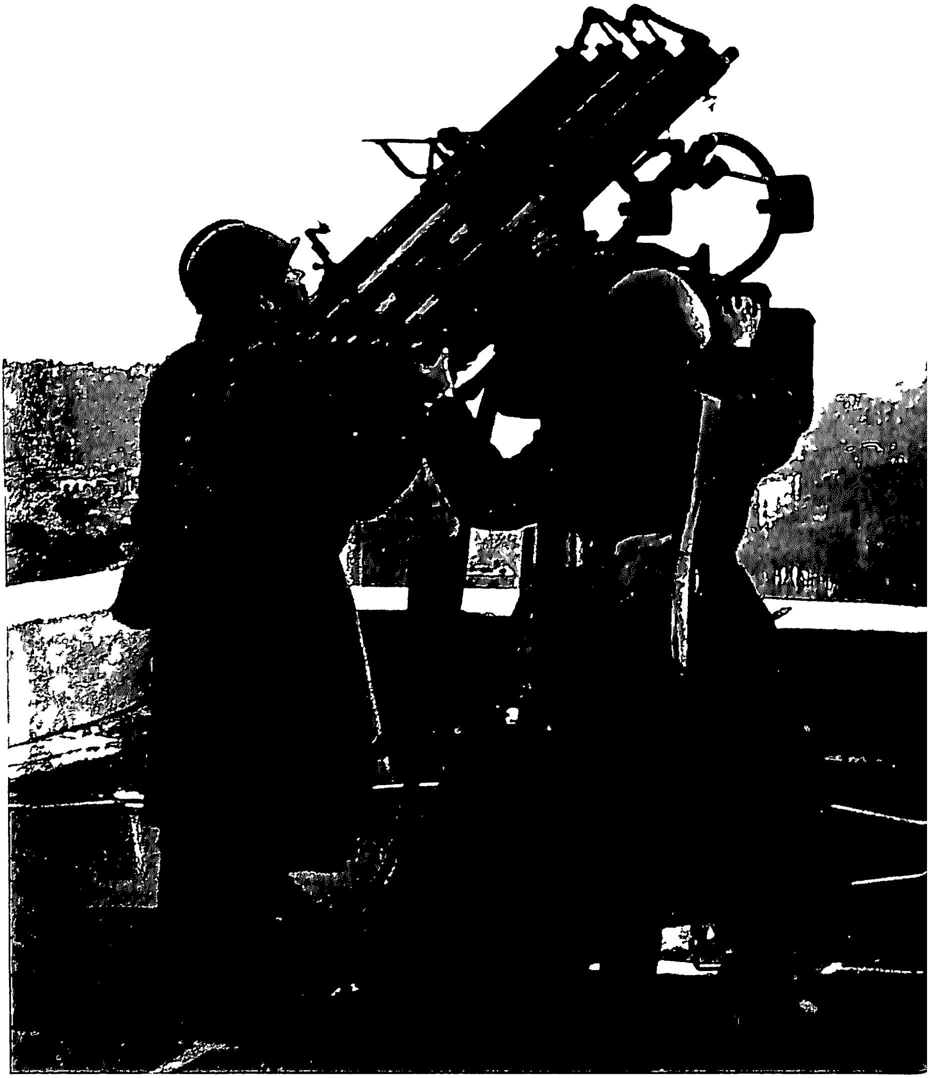




Women take over from their men-folk



Mortars ready for dispatch to the front

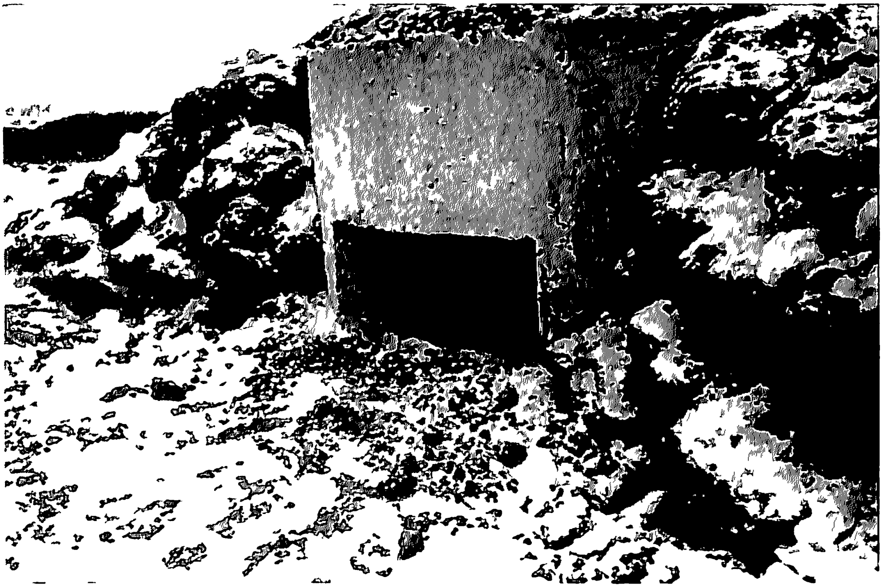




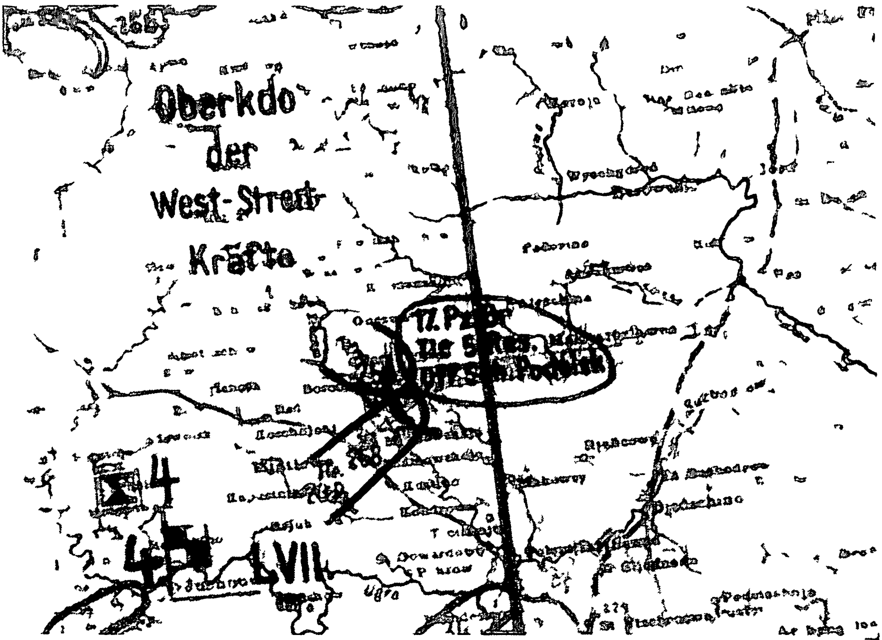


Revolution Day parade on Red Square 1941 Troops march past and straight on to the front

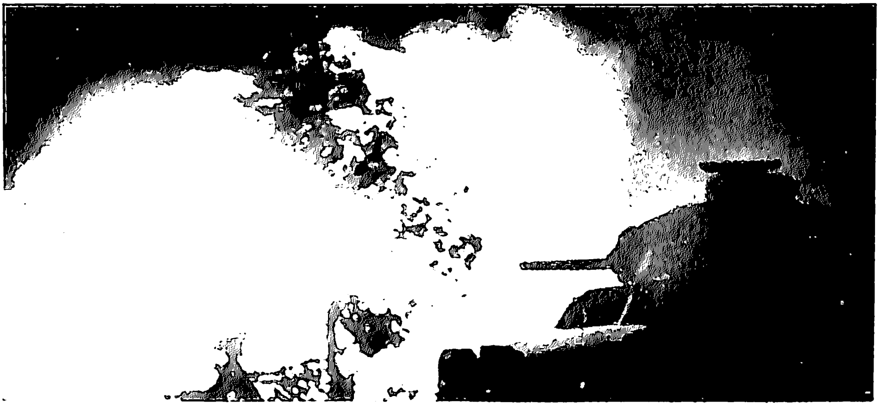




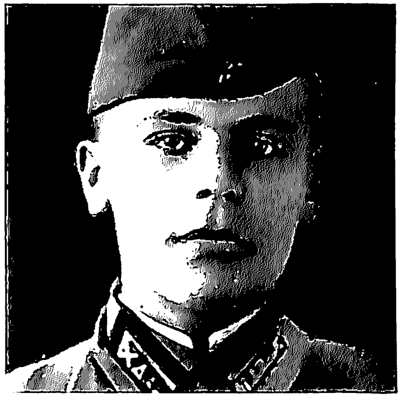
They stood to the last here



Field-Marshal von Bock s map October 1941 The legend Zwei Offizierschule Podolsk remained on it for two whole weeks











Podolsk cadets Vertilin, Hoffenscheffer, Sapozhnikov and Sokolov who in October 1941 stood to the death with their comrades, preventing units of the 57th Motorised Corps from breaking through to Moscow



General Konstantin Rokossovsky (right), commander of the 16th Army

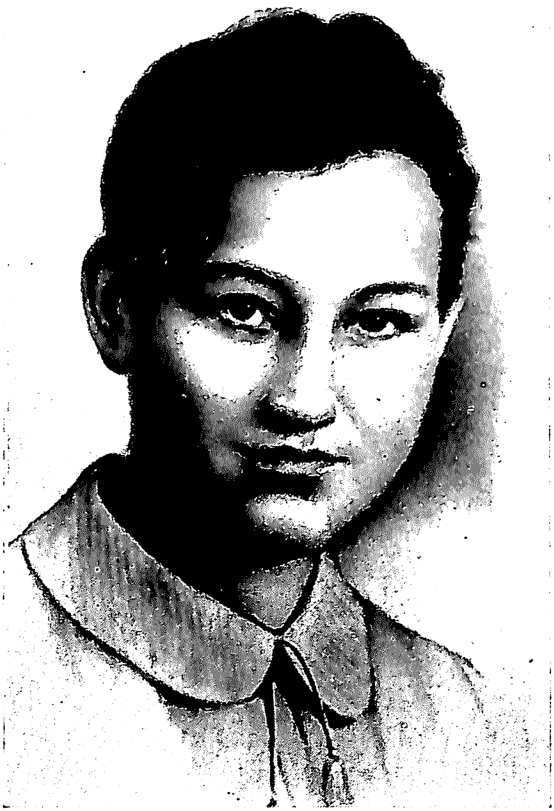


Counter-offensive





Partisans



Schoolgirl partisan Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya tortured and hung by the Germans



Meeting in the main square of Volokolamsk near the scaffold with the bodies of eight partisans hung by the Germans December 20 1941



Many a soldier owes his life to a girl like this

be alerted and assigned the most urgent task to contain the enemy until the rest of the available troops were brought up and deployed

This was an extreme measure Everyone concerned realised that cadets were the golden fund for the newly forming armies But there was no alternative

General Smirnov, Commander of the infantry military school, was placed in command of our combined unit I was appointed his deputy We decided that while our main forces dug in at the main defence position near the village of Ilyinskoye, where pillboxes had been built in advance we would send a mobile group forward to engage the advancing enemy and to force them to fight for every mile hill and stream

I ll send forward one of my battalions with two guns, said General Smirnov

Only two guns ? I exclaimed The tanks will smother them

Oh my boys will cope with them all right They have hand-grenades and incendiary bottles

By that time I already knew what these bottles were worth I told the general that they very often let the soldiers down and we decided to attach two batteries to the forward group We chose the best guns we had and manned them with the best from among the many volunteers

They were aware of what they were up against they had to check the onrushing steel monster by dint of their knowledge, ruse, audacity and perhaps at the cost of their lives They had to prevent the enemy from rushing our non-existent defences

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The enemy must be contained for five or seven days " Five or seven days On October 5, a Sunday, we had quite a lot of visitors, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters of our cadets

The sound of the battle alarm brought the war to the very doorstep of our school and drew an invisible line between the civilians and those who went to the front

I remember how the boys gleefully shouted to each other 'We'll show the nazis what s what You just wait and see! ' But I already knew what war was like Despite myself, I recalled a similar situation when, at the dawn of Soviet power Kiev Komsomol members were starting out to rout the bands of ataman Zelyony Our cadet detachment had marched together with them almost all the way

Then we had been separated Several days later we had learned their tragic fate Few of them knew how to handle a rifle apart from which the bandits had caught them unawares and captured them all After being tortured they had been taken to the steep bank of the Dnieper River, bound with barbed wire and thrown into the water

That had been in Tripolye

No, this cannot happen again, I tried to reassure myself Although the cadets weapons left much to be desired they had perfect mastery over them Moreover they were practically officers and they had a seasoned commander Captain Rossikov

When the forward battalion was ready to move—ammunition loaded, guns hitched to the lorries and the crews in their places—Rossikov ran up to me with the report

Take care of the boys, I told him in a low voice Remember you must not only contain the Germans, but also save the boys from being wiped out We still have to make officers out of them

I knew it was simple human weakness in me I was haunted by the Tripolye incident or by the fathers and mothers of these boys who were still crowding around the lorries looking at their sons with hope But behind them was Moscow and they had to bar the way to it for the German panzer divisions

I saw that the battalion commander realised it too When he saluted and said quietly "I understand, Comrade Colonel, I knew I could rely on him

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Podolsk-Maloyaroslavets-Medyn-Myatlevo At dawn on October 6 our cadets reached the western outskirts of the village Strekalovo where they found some Soviet soldiers who were exchanging lively fire with the Germans I hesitate even to call them soldiers since they were sixteen- and seventeen-year-old boys armed with German submachine-guns and machine-guns Captain Ivan Starchak, chief of the paratrooper service of the Western Front was in command

Later they told us their story They were Komsomol activists from the regions which were occupied by the Germans, and were training at a special reconnaissance school They were going to operate deep in enemy territory

Starchak was their parachute instructor When they heard of the German breakthrough, Starchak realised that the road to Moscow

was wide open He assumed command over the group and straddled the road

For 24 hours they kept the Germans at bay Twenty-four hours meant a lot in those days Hundreds of young Komsomol boys gave their lives on that small stretch of road from Yukhnov to the river Ugra Each captured submachine-gun and machine-gun had meant the spitting of their blood But they had held out!

Starchak was overjoyed when he saw the cadets

Well boys now we shall show those nazis a thing or two Look, he explained to Captain Rossikov See that village ahead? It s called Krasny Stolb and it s in German hands Let s knock them out and dig in along the bank of the Ugra Let them try and ford the river under our fire! We ve blown up the bridge

No sooner said than done Captain Bazylenko s 76-mm guns were positioned at Strekalovo and Lieutenant Nosov was to support the attack by direct fire of his 45-mm artillery platoons

Finally the signal for the attack was given

I had witnessed many attacks and more than once had gone over the top myself, rising from what seemed the safest place on earth to hurl myself into the unknown I had seen both newly-fledged and experienced soldiers rushing into the attack They had all had one aim to win and remain alive But these cadets were different

I did not see their first attack but several days later I fought with them shoulder to shoulder and I must say I never saw anything like it either before or after

They went into the attack as if they lived all their life in the expectation of this moment It was their great occasion their moment of triumph They rushed forward without fear or doubt They were few in number but they came with the fury of a hurricane devastating everything in its path

Their fearlessness however sometimes resulted in heavy losses which could have been avoided This was due to their lack of experience and to our errors in the system of education In peace time we taught boys from school age that heroism and bravery are incompatible with the wish to preserve one s life And many of them lost their lives because false shame did not allow them to use the trenches and terrain as cover from shell splinters

But daredevil bravery won the day

I doubt if the Germans had ever witnessed such an attack either It took them completely by surprise They dropped their weapons and knapsacks and fled along the entire sector towards the Ugra,

splashed their way across, scuttled up the bank and rushed on towards Yukhnov

The cadets stopped at the bank The Germans had come to their senses and were putting up an artillery barrage to cover their fleeing troops Three German howitzer battalions and five mortar batteries kept up a steady fire and prevented the cadets from following up their successful attack The cadets then began digging in and not a minute too soon for just then German bombers and attack planes appeared overhead and started bombing our side of the river Luckily for us they thought that we had a large force concentrated in the woods and heavily pounded nearby groves where there was not a single soldier

Then they launched an attack with an infantry regiment supported by ten tanks Now it was our artillerymen s turn to prove their worth Bazylenko s guns mowed down the attackers with shrapnel 45-mm guns opened direct fire at the tanks When the Germans dropped to the ground the cadets rushed them The odds were one against five But no force on earth could withstand them

The tanks stopped and held their fire, our artillery was also silent both were afraid of hitting their own men In the end the Germans fled

Our officers had great difficulty in restraining the cadets from pursuing the Germans

The enemy lost over 300 men and officers killed, three tanks and an armoured car and we took several dozen prisoners

We too had many killed and even more wounded All in all nearly one hundred cadets were put out of action

One of the prisoners was an elderly *Oberleutnant* He was interrogated by Rossikov and throughout the interrogation kept craning his neck to see the main forces of the Russians He seemed to find it difficult to believe that the Germans had been defeated by a thin line of the cadets, little more than boys in oversize greatcoats When an enemy attacks large force, he must have troops at least as numerous There was logic in this reasoning

Apparently the German command thought along the same lines again and again their planes dropped their deathly load on the woods and groves round Strekalovo, felling trees by the dozen

Then tanks appeared with infantry in their wake There were more of them this time They were not only ahead of us but started to envelop us To accept battle meant inevitable death for all and before the end of the day either these or other German tanks would

roll into Ilyinskoye And we had no defences there We were really faced with the necessity of retreating

Retreat is hard to bear even for a seasoned veteran How much more so for an eighteen-year-old soldier who has seen the enemy fleeing only an hour ago The cadets knew that each step back was a step towards Moscow

A lorry loaded with shells drove into Strekalovo from the rear Georgi Sukhodolov battalion commissar and head of the school s political department jumped out of it

Why so gloomy commanders? he shouted to Starchak and Rossikov

It seems the time has come to retreat, said Starchak lowering his field-glasses But how am I to tell the boys? They ve lost many of their comrades here and vowed not to retreat We can of course simply order them to retreat–and they will obey That s what the army s for But this is an exceptional case

What s the retreat procedure? asked Sukhodolov

We ve decided that the artillery should move back piece by piece keeping up steady fire while the infantry should retreat to the river Izver and dig in The terrain there is very convenient for defence explained Rossikov pointing out the positions on the map

Not bad approved Sukhodolov Let s start Just one thing Summon all commissars and political instructors I want to have a short talk with them They should realise that it isn t a heroic feat for us all to die in one battle Better to contain the Germans for another few days And we can only do this alive

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That autumn we dreamt of and prayed for rain and low clouds But the weather was clear and calm and fascist fighters and dive-bombers roared over the woods which were still wearing their crimson autumn attire Day after day they strafed the cadets hunting down even lone soldiers From dawn till sunset bombers and fighters came in waves, one group in the wake of another Our aviation in those days was unable to give us air cover

Fighting raged incessantly on the ground too The guns constantly changed positions While the crew of one gun kept up fire, other guns were moved to new positions, either hitched to lorries or pushed by hand Those who did not move them up in time were showered with German shells

The worst was when the counter-attacking cadets had to be supported by direct fire Once we nearly lost two guns just as the

lorries rolled up on to the top of a hillock suitable for direct fire the Germans caught them with a mortar salvo The men were unscathed but the lorries burst into flames And one of them was loaded with shells The cadets tumbled down the hillock and only one man–the Party secretary of the battalion–remained by the lorries He knew that unless the counter-attacking cadets were supported by fire their chances of success were small

'Boys save the shells!

They saw him clamber up the burning lorry He himself was not much older than they and had not been in the Party very long If he could do it, so could they

It took only a few seconds to unload the lorries They unhitched the guns and rolled them after the attackers to support them with fire

But we were not always so lucky On the very first day at the Ugra river a platoon of 45-mm guns had to stay at a firing position rather longer than was safe They were helping a hard-pressed cadet company The Germans showered the platoon with mortar shells All the gun crews were either killed or wounded Vasya Sapozhnikov was wounded but continued to train the gun and Volodya Pilats kept up fire from the second gun The platoon fought on

The Germans stepped up the pressure with every day The cadets were falling back They had to pay dearly for every day they won from the Germans They all fought gallantly and remained in the battle even when wounded Many of them lost their lives and were buried there

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It was only on the sixth day of retreat that the cadets reached our main defence line at Ilyinskoye For the last two days, in the intervals between air raids we had been hearing the din of artillery fire and the rumble of exploding shells our main forces had engaged the enemy The cadets went on swathed in bandages, red-eyed and faces black with fatigue and gunpowder They all now looked at least thirty They were ready to drop with fatigue, but held out They now had confidence and knew what fighting was like

One of them stopped by the side of the road and looked at our badly battered trenches the ground was ploughed up by bombs and shells Nothing had been left whole 'They gave you hell, all right,' he said It never occurred to him that he was right out of hell himself

Captain Rossikov and Divisional Commissar Ivanov came up to me to report They had brought all eight guns with them They only needed light repair and could be used again This was a miracle But they had lost a lot of men

When he finished his report, Ivanov slumped down and buried his face in his hands

Sukhodolov tried to soothe him ' Don t feel so bad about it They ve done their bit and haven t died for nothing

Yes I know,' Ivanov said "But when I think of them Out of the 200 that went out first, only 30 are alive and they all need to be sent to hospital The rest are from the reinforcements that you sent us Incredible boys! You know it took me all I had to restrain them from spontaneous counter-attacks against the tanks Unbelievable '

When the main detachment arrived at Ilyinskoye (they had marched at great speed forty miles a day with full combat equipment), there were practically no defences here Some women and children had started digging an anti-tank ditch but the German bombers had scattered them Two lines of concrete pillboxes had been built that could withstand a direct hit of a 250-kg bomb but had neither armour-plate doors nor gun-slit plates When we saw them, it gave us a turn the slits were so wide that should a bomb explode outside the pillbox the fragments would come flying into it Later our apprehensions were substantiated When the Germans attacked them, they made full use of this shortcoming

There were no guns or machine-guns in them and they were not camouflaged in any way Nor were there any trenches We had to work fast

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From morning till night, as soon as the German planes had dropped their loads and flown off for new ones (they had already realised what was happening down below) the cadets dug trenches gun emplacements communication trenches and auxiliary gun positions And all the while a stream of refugees moved along the highroad together with remains of battered or almost completely wiped out units platoons battalions, but mostly groups knocked together from various divisions They nearly all carried weapons but were utterly exhausted

I was afraid that the sight of the retreating troops would have a bad effect on the cadets morale They remained alone to hold the enemy back But it turned out otherwise My boys were saying

"The nazis think they can beat anyone Let them come we ll give them a surprise

The expectation of battle, of course, had an adverse effect on the boys they were unnaturally talkative their eyes shone and thev joked unremittingly

On October 10, battle outposts were engaging the Germans quite close to the main defence line Reconnaissance reported that the enemy were bringing in large forces and concentrating them in front of us We expected the offensive early in the morning

The day was drawing to a close and the pale sun had touched the tip of the far-away birch-tree forest when we were visited by the secretary of the Central Committee and member of the Military Council of the Moscow military area A S Shcherbakov He had aged and looked haggard I ve come to warn you,' he said to the commanders and commissars who had gathered in the dugout of the reserve regiment, the Germans must not pass this line of defence The Party demands it You must hold on to your positions even if you are encircled You must contain them at any cost and fight to the last man Don't forget that there is nothing between you and Moscow '

9

On the evening of October 11, we received the sad news of the death of Captain Rossikov

This is how it happened After joining the main forces his battalion was disbanded One of his batteries was set the task of defending the road He himself was to take command of the other one which was sent off to the north to give support to the neighbouring 1064th infantry regiment

The regimental commander assumed that the enemy would advance through the village of Zelenino and sent the battery there The cadets were sure that they would find friendly troops there and drove into an ambush

The nazis patiently waited until the last lorry had driven into the village, then fired once from all sides and shouted Surrender!

The situation seemed hopeless a gun was trained directly at the foremost lorry and there were the muzzles of machine-guns and submachine-guns all around

Was this glorious battery to suffer such an ignominious end? Were these boys who after setting a German tank on fire used to whisper "Here, you worm, here's Moscow for you, and who had

vowed rather to die than to let the Germans through, were they now to raise their hands?

It was either our boys lightning reaction, or that the nazis simply had not expected resistance could not believe it, or perhaps Suvorov s words A bullet shies from the brave had come true Both sides opened fire almost simultaneously Captain Rossikov and his deputy were killed on the instant But the boys learned about it only later Right now they were raining the enemy with hand-grenades They organised an all-round defence and had already unhitched two guns

Mortar shells exploded on all sides The din was terrific, fragments screamed through the air Portnoi, the gun-layer, was wounded twice before he could take his place at the sights and still was already training his gun Fire! The second gun opened up seconds later scattering the German gun crew and smashing their gun The third gun blasted at the German machine-gunners Its gun-layer, Sushko a young writer, was wounded several times Later on he exclaimed enthusiastically I m overwhelmed What people! When I m back home I m going to write a book about them

The battery fought its way through to its units The cadets loaded their wounded and dead into the lorries and drove them away The guns slowly retreated towards the river snapping back with accurate shots Afterwards the battery kept up its reputation not a single German tank could get through on its sector Incidentally two German officers were captured in that skirmish

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The Germans fared badly in the first three days of fighting in this sector Later, captured German officers told us that their command had kept urging 'Forward, forward! Maloyaroslavets must be taken immediately! Tank, motorised and infantry units came in waves but got no farther than the approaches to our defences The battlefield was littered with gutted tanks, silent guns and dead soldiers

The German artillery operated in a particularly absurd manner

We had received reinforcements–the 64th heavy howitzer regiment and a battalion of the 517th artillery regiment

Events regularly took the following course A German battery would appear from the woods and gracefully deploy in the open as if on training grounds But before they could load our 152-mm shells would explode near their guns After five minutes only corpses and smashed guns would be left

We received invaluable help from a battalion of *Katyusha* rocket launchers which made its first appearance on this sector of the front

Its first salvo was a particularly memorable event

According to our reconnaissance in a sparse birch-tree forest barely visible from our observation post the enemy had concentrated a considerable force of infantry armoured cars and tanks in preparation for the decisive attack The commander of the rocket-launcher battalion took the range and decided that it was too far to reach them but if he moved his trucks right up to our forward edge the distance would be perfect He decided to take the risk

It was a bold manoeuvre The trucks with the launchers drove out into the open and formed a line They were in full sight of the Germans who continued to pound their old objectives dutifully Fire! A huge brown cloud rose over the forest and was followed by an ear-splitting roar The Germans came running out of the forest while detonation after detonation continued to resound there

The German fire gradually died down A strange silence set in The nazis did not attempt to attack that day And even several days later prisoners were still talking about how stunned they had been by the rocket salvo

On one occasion the rocket battalion was held up on its firing position putting right some damage Junkers immediately made their appearance The hateful *Katyushas* were their coveted target When the battalion drove out onto the road, it was already too late the squadron of planes dipped their noses and rapidly approached the column Deep ditches prevented the trucks from driving off the road and it was too far to the forest side-road All seemed to be up with the column The day was saved by the experienced driver of the leading truck Evgeni Rotobelsky In the last seconds he spotted a ditch half-filled with earth He veered the truck at full speed across the ditch and into a dense forest The rest of the trucks followed suit The bombers roared past, unable to swerve in time

We could not see the manoeuvre and when the thunder of the exploding 250-kg bombs reached us we thought it was all over with the rocket battalion Imagine our joy when after what we thought was a devastating bombardment we saw our trucks driving out of the forest undamaged

Throughout these days the German command had with a mule-like obstinacy, attempted to smash through our defences with a frontal blow Finally it woke up to the necessity of making a flanking movement This is noted in *The History of the Great Patriotic War* "Undermanned units of the Maloyaroslavets fighting zone

put up a staunch resistance to the 57th Motorised Corps The German panzers then circled the zone on the north and delivered a blow in the direction of Borovsk

On October 14 we received information on developments in the south too A tank column with a party of tommy-gunners had crossed the river Vypreika and was heading north in an attempt to cut off the Warsaw Highway behind our backs and break our communications with Maloyaroslavets

I ordered the commander of the rocket battalion to retreat immediately to the rear with a platoon of cadets We had no right to risk losing the launchers Some other units retreated with the battalion

The cadets remained behind When the enemy ring closed I realised that we were now alone Alone and encircled We had not been commanded to try and break out

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Our one aim now was to hold out

We straddled the road and as long as it was in our hands we could consider ourselves to be the victors, whatever the price

And the price was high Bombers droned over the defence zone all day long raining bombs on every inch of ground German artillery pounded our trenches, dugouts and gun emplacements Our batteries thinned out

But when after two or three hours bombardment the nazis again rose to the attack they were met by accurate fire from our guns and submachine-guns The cadets displayed excellent marksmanship And once more tanks burned beyond the Vypreika and the hills there were covered with the bodies of dead German soldiers

The German tanks came out into our rear and captured a stretch of the road almost as far as Maloyaroslavets But as long as we held on in Ilyinskoye they could not deploy their motorised forces because only tanks could negotiate the marshy ground in that area

Our situation however was worsening with every hour One after another our guns fell silent We later found out that German tommy-gunners had come out into our rear and captured our ammunition and ration dump And by that time we had no spare men with which to recapture the dump Then came the news about the destruction of the half-battery commanded by the political instructor Levin

The half-battery together with the cadet platoon had been covering our defence zone in the Kaluga direction The cadets had

been able to hold out while they were supported by an infantry regiment But when it had to withdraw the cadets assumed an all-round defence and fought on for another day drawing on themselves sizable German forces When they were attacked by tanks and armoured cars however, it became apparent that it was useless to continue resisting and they decided to fight their way to the main force

The infantry cadets broke out under artillery cover but the artillerymen themselves did not escape their battery was on fire and all the boys wounded

The nazis surrounded the battery and proposed that the crews should surrender The cadets answered them with accurate fire which set several armoured cars on fire Then they took advantage of the Germans confusion to change their positions and assume an all-round defence

They fought on for several more hours Some four or five dozen dead Germans lay at the nearby houses Then the guns fell silent and the Germans decided that either the Russians had run out of ammunition or there was no one left alive They called out armoured cars Two of them, firing continuously from their machine-guns slowly approached the gun positions Nearer and nearer they came All of a sudden a shot rang out It hit one of the cars at close range The car burst into flames The second car quickly reversed But no second shot followed the breech block had jammed

The flames from the burning car set the neighbouring houses and sheds on fire Levin gathered all those who were still alive and made a dash to a detached house, away from the fire Here they entrenched themselves They all had enemy submachine-guns to fight with But the Germans brought up a howitzer battery and blasted the house to smithereens In the night a lone cadet came to in the frosty air, crawled out of the ruins and reached his unit It was he who told the story of how his comrades had died

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On that same day, October 14, the enemy adopted new tactics against our gun emplacements V Korotchayev, deputy of the school s political instructor came running to my command post, regardless of shell bursts and all but weeping in desperation

Comrade Colonel, the nazis have blown up two of our emplacements!

"How? '

They opened up direct fire at embrasures from their AA guns

That was what I had been afraid of all the time When we still had heavy guns we could counter the German batteries which would move out of the forest for direct fire but now we had none left The Germans had immediately taken advantage of this

What about the men?

All killed

The picture was quite clear the enemy gunners were shooting off camouflage to bare the sides of the emplacement and then aiming at embrasures Even a small shell, if it exploded inside the emplacement would riddle everything there and the blast wave would kill everyone who escaped the splinters

I could imagine how the boys had felt when the German shells would burst on the front face of the emplacement They were artillerymen themselves and realised that this meant the end But they had vowed to die rather than to retreat And they died

If our emplacements had had armour platings and doors, their decision to stand to the last would have been justified But what were we to do now? Was there a way out?

I gave orders to roll the gun out of the emplacement and take up auxiliary positions as soon as the enemy opened direct fire

The order was duplicated and sent out with messengers Half an hour later, however, a captured *Oberleutnant* was brought to me in his field-case there was a copy of my order

Where is the cadet from whom you took this? I asked him

He ran his hand across his throat

From the very first day we had to fight disguised scouts which the enemy kept sending into our rear in great numbers They would attack lone cars, sentries, remote outposts and separate gun and machine-gun emplacements The fight against these scouts considerably drained the cadets strength

On October 15 the nazis kept up the pressure They gradually tightened the noose and methodically picked out one emplacement after another But now with less success as soon as the German shells began hitting the emplacement, our men would clamber out and after the shelling ended, when one of the shells found its mark and burst inside the emplacement, they would return to it and the deathly game would start all over again

At noon after a bombing raid a plane flew at tree-top level and dropped a trail of leaflets They read Courageous red cadets! You ve fought gallantly, but your resistance is now senseless the Warsaw Highway is in our hands almost as far as Moscow Within

a day or two we will march into the city You are real soldiers We respect your heroism Come over to our side You will find a friendly reception here, good food and warm clothes This leaflet will serve you as a pass

We had enough food but could have done with warm clothes When we had been alerted in our hurry we had not thought of bringing warm underwear And now we could not even light a fire because German mortarmen were past masters of their trade

Nevertheless, the boys were brave enough to joke about the leaflet

They were still laughing when we heard the rumble of tank engines This time it came not from the west but from the east Could these be our tanks?

The foremost machine appeared followed by a second then a third a whole column of them And there was a red banner flying over the forward tank The boys began climbing out of the trenches and emplacements 'They re ours! Coming to help us out!

Suddenly someone cried out

No, it s the nazis!

And then we noticed the crosses on the tanks' sides The crews rushed to their guns and seconds later a hail of steel met the German panzers

A seventeen-year-old gun-layer Sineokov, whose gun happened to be in the most advantageous position, got one of the tanks with the first shot It belched smoke and fire But the recoil was so great that the eye-piece of the sight hit Sineokov in the eye and incapacitated him Yuri Dobrynin took his place Another tank went up in flames A lucky shell hit a lorry with ammunition and it exploded with a tremendous boom

But German infantrymen had already jumped down from the tanks and troop carriers and were stealing up among the trees to the gun emplacements Bullets from a machine-gun they installed behind a birch-tree began crashing against the gun shield Shells were bursting on all sides of the gun one of the tanks was ranging its fire

Yuri kept cool His first shot was slightly to one side His second hit the birch-tree which toppled over crushing the machine-gun and its crew Now it was the tank s turn

The clash lasted a mere eight minutes Only one tank managed to escape The foremost tank tried to break through our positions at top speed But the cadets stopped it with a concerted salvo It was hard to tell whose shell had put the tank out of action there were so many holes in it

All in all we destroyed fourteen tanks and a dozen trucks and troop carriers, Yuri and his gun crew got six of the tanks and two armoured cars

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Fighting raged all night An experienced ear can judge which way the fighting is going from the sound of submachine-gun fire Huddling in a slit and shivering with cold in our greatcoats Sukhodolov and I listened to the sounds of the night fighting, trying to estimate the situation The enemy tommy-gunners had evidently seeped through between the gun emplacements and infiltrated our defences A raw soldier would have thought that the cadets had already been overrun and that the Germans were about to hand-grenade the command post But we knew otherwise The night sounds told us that the cadets were holding their ground They were holding out even though they were greatly outnumbered and the enemy had separated the crews manning the emplacements We firmly believed that when morning came the road would still be in our hands

The following is an excerpt from notes made by the battalion Commissar Andropov several days after the fighting He had been in an emplacement in the main line of attack

October 15 14 bomb raids in a day with 23-27 planes in each raid Continuous artillery and mortar shelling in the intervals The nazis obviously decided that if they could not kill us, they must try and break our morale, fray our nerves and make us incapable of stubborn resistance

' Bombs and shells tore the earth up all around us Infantry units entrenched between the emplacements were ordered to move to the rear At about 9 in the evening nazi tanks shot incendiary shells and set fire to several houses behind our gun emplacements The burning houses turned night into day

What are they up to? I wondered The Germans soon supplied the answer Dozens of their tommy-gunners sprayed the air with tracer bullets behind our gun emplacements at the highway and behind the houses Almost a battalion of Germans penetrated our lines and came out into our rear Beyond doubt they had somehow learned that we had no infantry protection and were taking advantage of this to block and destroy the emplacements

Our garrison assumed an all-round defence with three men under Lieutenant Deremyan manning the gun and six men under my command in the trench The Germans opened up intensive fire from behind the fences and from the bushes

'A dozen or so Germans crawled towards the gulley from the highway They could easily hand-grenade us from there What s more our trench ended in the gulley and any of them once in the gulley, could mow us down with one burst from his submachine-gun The situation was becoming critical Meanwhile several Germans who managed to crawl up to our emplacement from the front under cover of darkness threw three hand-grenades at the embrasure But these bounced from the gun shield and exploded outside The gun however was damaged–its recoiling mechanism was smashed to pieces The men escaped with their lives but they were deafened by the shock

'We were only a handful in comparison with the masses of Germans attacking us, and no matter how doggedly we fought them they were sure to wipe us out We were saved by the infantrymen who hastened to our help from the depths of our defences They rushed the Germans and hurled them back

The 16th of October had an unusual beginning We were used to greet each day under a hail of bombs and shells but that day there was complete silence We wondered what trick the Germans were thinking up now

Gunsmith Evstratov came and quickly put right the light machine-gun but could not repair the damaged gun I ordered Deremyan to get ready as many drums as possible and replace the gun with the machine-gun It was now to be a machine-gun emplacement

"At noon tanks appeared One of them crawled up to the neighbouring emplacement and began firing point-blank at the embrasure It answered with machine-gun fire Obviously its gun was also out of order After logging six or eight shells into the embrasure, the tankmen were convinced that the emplacement was put out of action They had overlooked us A tankman opened the turret, jumped down and walked towards the emplacement Holding my breath, I squeezed the trigger The tankman crumpled up and fell to the ground At that very moment I heard shouts coming from left I turned my head and saw about twenty nazis running towards the tank, waving submachine-guns and hand-grenades They still did not suspect our presence When they came within twenty yards, Deremyan hurled a bunch of anti-tank grenades at them

'Now the nazis became very well aware of our existence A gun started shelling our emplacement One shell burst inside mortally wounding two men The gun-layer received a terrible wound in the face and was taken into the dugout

'Soon only five men capable of offering resistance remained '

14

The sunrise of October 16 illuminated a fresh fall of snow Now the cold had joined forces with the Germans

The circle tightened and the fighting raged on We often had to send sections and platoons of cadets to help out the encircled gun emplacements and batteries These sorties were not always effective and we suffered heavy losses

The Germans succeeded in capturing the first line of emplacements but the second line held on

The nazis brought up AA guns and started firing directly at the emplacements which covered the highway and the bridge Among these was the one about which I was writing right at the beginning of these reminiscences I have described how after a direct hit there was an explosion in the emplacement and it belched smoke, how the tank column and infantry moved up to it and how the dead emplacement then came alive again

In the afternoon the wounded cadet Dorozhkin tumbled into our command post He was an observer at a gun emplacement concealed inside a peasant hut Its men had destroyed several tanks and nearly a hundred nazis For a long time the Germans had failed to locate the emplacement But now it was all over The Germans had set the hut on fire and hand-grenaded the gun crew

Towards evening the situation became critical The platoons which I kept sending out to help the batteries were even unable to reach our second line And meanwhile the Germans were pressing on They came to grips with the last line of our defence– around our command post The cadets met the attackers with hand-grenades, submachine-gun fire and case-shots from the last guns

At dusk an observer reported from the top of an old birch-tree that a column of tanks was fording the river and advancing along the highway

'How are we to stop the column?' I was frantic According to the reports there was nothing left along the highway with which to halt the tanks

The observer continued his report "The tanks have crossed the river and are moving through Ilyinskoye They're going past the destroyed AA battery "

And then came a delighted yell "Hurrah! Someone hit two tanks one after another! One more tank is on fire! And an-

other Comrade Colonel, the tanks are turning and heading back for the river

I do not know to this day who were the nameless heroes to do the impossible

15

No matter how hard I try, I cannot set out the last hours of October 17 in an orderly chain of events I remember rushing into the attack, giving orders, hearing reports I remember how we hand-grenaded and beat back the Germans who had managed to seep through our last line of defence right up to our dugouts I remember how we counter-attacked but all the time I was in a kind of daze, what with exhaustion, nervous strain and lack of sleep

Every action was an effort, talking, moving about thinking or just hearing people out This is how I would talk

What is this scout saying? Louder! What? German tanks are blocking us from the rear along the entire perimetre? It is impossible to break through? What? Who is thinking of breaking through? Not we! We shall stand to the last

It was clear that our end was near, but the Party had ordered us to hold out till the last So we were going to hold out

On this day it was light in the forest The trees stood without foliage, many without even branches

Sukhodolov came up He had just returned from the unit which was defending one of our most vulnerable sectors, the forest s edge in front of an anti-tank ditch The ditch was very convenient for the Germans to prepare their attack The nazis would pound our positions with shells over and over again and then rush into the attack There had already been three of them in the morning But I was confident in the boys They were the oldest of the cadets and had all graduated from various institutes, they were all Komsomol members and their commander was our political instructor Shurin

"What s new? I asked Sukhodolov

' Shurin is seriously wounded, he answered gloomily

'How did it happen? ' I asked in alarm

"They were beating off an attack There were only eighteen of them together with Shurin Drunken Germans, nearly a hundred of them, advanced, shouting *Russ*, surrender!' Shurin saw that they would be unable to hold them and led the boys into a counter-attack

In those days I heard about many such instances when a handful of cadets rushed vastly superior attackers But I had always found it difficult to comprehend even though I myself had witnessed it

Shurin had recently graduated from Moscow University and was teaching the history of the Communist Party at our school, teaching the cadets to follow the examples of the Party and Civil War heroes And now when the time had come to fight, he had proved that the words and deeds of a Communist are never at variance

How did it end? I asked

They drove the Germans back but Shurin was wounded in the neck When he was being taken out of the fray he was wounded a second time

'Too bad "

Then came an attack from the other side But that was repulsed too I was wondering all the time why the nazis were no longer trying to break through with their tanks along the highway They probably did not want to risk losing their machines If they had known that we had nothing to hold them with now! Absolutely nothing We must have given them a good thrashing to make them so cautious

Two cadets led a wounded sergeant up to me I did not know him He could hardly stand on his feet and reported with an effort

"Comrade Colonel seven of us tried to get through to you I managed it Here is a letter with an order

I impatiently tore the letter open and read 'You are ordered to lead out the units of the artillery school and immediately have them commissioned

16

Then followed a difficult period as we broke out of the encirclement And after that the war went on Those cadets who managed to get through were put in command of anti-tank platoons and batteries The life of an anti-tank gunner is a short one, he by no means always comes out victorious from a one-to-one battle with a tank Hardened soldiers used to say that the anti-tankman like the sapper made only one mistake in his life

What else can I say about the boys? Almost every one who returned to the school applied to join the Party

I would not want the reader to get the impression that the cadets were alone in fighting the Germans on the Maloyaroslavets

direction No, side by side with them, inspired by their staunchness and heroism, fought officers and soldiers of other artillery battalions regiments and infantry platoons

25 Years Later

The story Twelve Days of One Year' was published in *Yunost* magazine and was followed by an avalanche of letters In the space of two months I received over 250 of them, apart from visits and telephone calls

There were letters from former cadets who had fought in the Battle of Moscow and from their relatives and friends Veterans recalled battlefield episodes and their comrades-in-arms Here is what Leonid Polkovnikov wrote from Obninsk I was given an order to hold the enemy with my gun crew We had only one gun and a few cases of ammo Our crew remained on the other side of the river in front of Ilyinskoye facing the Germans You probably remember this A hail of shells came down on us We fell one after the other The gun barrel was red-hot Then there was a direct hit and the gun was destroyed I called the lorry from the cover and we loaded the wounded cadets into it One was heavily wounded and cursing, the other kept moaning

I ran ahead of the lorry to show the way Suddenly a shell struck the lorry and killed both cadets

I was wounded in the head and back but managed to pull the driver from the wrecked lorry and carry him across the bridge Hardly had we crossed the bridge than it blew up

On May 8-9 1966 on Victory Day, fifty of those who had fought on the Ilyinskoye defence line came to honour the memory of their comrades who had died

We started on our journey of commemorative places at Yukhnov about 125 miles from Moscow, where on the Ugra River on October 5 paratroopers had fought under the command of Captain Ivan Starchak, now a retired colonel

Among the veterans were the men who had taken part in the attack on October 6 that had caused so much confusion among the Germans

A slim lieutenant-colonel in cavalry uniform attracted everyone s attention We recognised in him Vladimir Zagoskin from the Podolsk infantry officer school He was then command post commandant and at the critical moment when the Germans broke through into our rear, he cried out for all he was worth 'Come on, let s show the nazis what the Russian bayonet can do!' and led the cadets into a daredevil attack

The years have spared the retired Colonel Aron Kopelev In those days Major Kopelev was chief of staff of the artillery group of the Ilyinskoye defence area

The pillboxes have to this day retained the scars of the artillery shelling and bombardment Many former cadets who gathered for the occasion could supply fascinating details about the heroic days of 1941 and told us about episodes which had passed unnoticed

A former cadet, Ivan Bolshakov, now lecturer at the Kuibyshev Military Engineering Academy, recalled the following episode After an abortive counter-attack the area commander ordered us to blow up the bridge across the Vypreika river The river was then quite deep and could not be forded Time passed and there was no explosion Our cadets anxiously watched German tanks approach the bank of the river Two of them struck land-mines but the rest rolled onto the bridge Only when the leading machine reached the middle of it, the bridge blew up The sapper cadets had risked their lives to send the tanks to the bottom of the river

Pyotr Lidov

Journalist Pyotr Lidov s article Tanya describ ing the heroism of a young Moscow Komsomol girl who was tortured and hanged by the nazis appeared in *Pravda* on January 27 1942

The story produced a tremendous impact and was translated into dozens of languages

As a war correspondent for *Pravda* Pyotr Lidov made several flights across the front line to Byelo russian partisans undertook a risky journey to occu pied Minsk and visited the various fighting fronts collecting material for his articles despatches and stories which appeared regularly in the national press

Pyotr Lidov was killed near Poltava in 1944 while firing at enemy bombers from an anti aircraft gun

TANYA

At the beginning of December 1941, in the village of Petrishchevo near Vereya, the Germans executed an eighteen-year-old Moscow Komsomol girl, who had told them her name was Tanya

Those were the grim days when the threat to the capital was most grave Fighting was going on in Moscow s countryside near Golitsyno and Skhodnya, where many Muscovites had their summer places Meanwhile, in Moscow, the bravest volunteers were selected and sent across the front line to help the partisan units fighting in the enemy rear

Shortly afterwards, someone cut all the lines of the German field telephone in Petrishchevo, and then set fire to a German stable with seventeen horses in it The partisan was caught the next day

The circumstances of his arrest, pieced together from various accounts by the local collective farmers, were as follows the man, wearing a fur cap, fur-lined jacket, padded trousers and felt boots, and carrying a shoulder-bag, made his way to an important military objective, thrust his revolver inside his coat, got out a bottle of benzine from his bag, poured it over the wall, and was just bending down to set a match to it, when the German sentry crept up behind and grabbed hold of him

The partisan managed to push the German away and draw his revolver but that was as far as he got The sentry knocked it out of his hand and raised the alarm

The partisan was taken to the cottage where the officers were billeted, and then the Germans saw that the partisan was a girl, a very young girl, tall and slim, with big dark eyes and dark hair cut very short

The owners of the cottage were ordered to go into the kitchen from where they could hear the officer's questions and the girl s

quick, unhesitating answers No , I don t know , I won t tell you", 'No ' Then they heard leather belts swishing and striking the girl s body A few moments later, one of the officers, a very young man, came rushing out of the room and sat in the kitchen until the interrogation was over, his eyes shut tight and his hands over his ears

The cottage owners counted two hundred lashes, but heard not a sound from the girl After that she again replied No I won t talk , in the same deliberate tone, except that her voice sounded hollow now

After the interrogation, the girl was led to the cottage of Vasily Alexandrovich Kulik She was wearing only a chemise and knickers, and walked bare-foot on the snow

When she entered the cottage Kulik and his wife saw in the light of the lamp that she had a large bruise on her forehead and welts on her legs and arms The girl s hands were tied behind her back Her lips were swollen and bleeding–she must have bitten them while they were beating her

She sat down on a bench A sentry stood guard at the door Lying on the stove bed Vasily and Praskovya Kulik watched the prisoner She sat perfectly still, and then asked for a drink of water Vasily climbed down from the stove and went to the water barrel, but the sentry pushed him away

'Want a beating too? ' he snarled

The soldiers quartered in the cottage surrounded the girl and made cruel fun of her Some pummelled her with their fists, others held lighted matches right under her chin, and one man ran a hand-saw across her back

When they d had their fill, they went to sleep The sentry waved his rifle at her and ordered her outside He walked behind her down the street the tip of his bayonet almost touching her back At the end of the street he ordered her to go back He kept the girl walking back and forth in the snow bare-foot and in her underwear until he himself was frozen through and decided it was time to go indoors

This sentry guarded her from ten in the evening till two in the morning, taking her out into the cold for fifteen or twenty minutes every hour or so At last another sentry came on duty, and he allowed the girl to lie down on the bench

Praskovya Kulik stole up to the girl and spoke to her

'What s your name? she asked

What s it to you?' the girl replied

Where are you from?

Moscow

Have you a father and mother?

The girl made no reply She lay on the bench till morning without stirring or speaking not a moan escaped her, though her feet were frost-bitten and must have hurt terribly

No one knew whether she had slept that night, surrounded by enemies, or what she had been thinking about

In the morning, the soldiers began to erect a gallows in the centre of the village

Praskovya spoke to the girl again

Was it you the day before yesterday?

Yes Did the Germans die in the flames?

No "

Pity What was burnt then?'

Their horses And arms too, they say

The officers came at ten in the morning

Are you going to tell us your name?" the senior officer asked her in Russian

She made no answer

Vasily and Praskovya Kulik were ordered out of the house and were only admitted again when the interrogation was over

Some of the girl s things were brought from the commandant s office her jacket, padded trousers and stockings and her bag which contained several bottles of benzine, matches, cartridges sugar and salt Her fur cap, fur-lined coat and felt boots had already been appropriated by the sergeants

The girl called Tanya was stuffed into the trousers and jacket, and the Kuliks helped her pull her stockings over her livid, frost-bitten feet The Germans hung the bottles of benzine they had found in her bag and a sign with the word 'Partisan round Tanya s neck, and walked her to the square

Ten mounted soldiers with drawn swords surrounded the gallows Lined up behind them were over a hundred German soldiers and several officers The local population had been ordered to attend the execution, but only a few people had turned up Some of them slipped quietly away so as not to witness the horrible spectacle

Two packing cases were placed one on top of the other under the noose Tanya was lifted up to the top case and the noose was slipped round her neck One of the officers trained his camera on the gallows–the Germans are notoriously fond of photographing executions and punishments The commandant made a sign to the hangmen, bidding them to wait

Tanya took her chance and called out in a loud clear voice addressing the collective farmers who had been herded there

‘Hey, comrades, why d you look so glum? Show more courage, fight, kill the Germans, burn them, hunt them down like rats!

The soldier standing next to her raised his arm to hit her or clamp his hand over her mouth, but she knocked it away and went on shouting

‘I m not afraid of death, comrades It s happiness to die for your people ’

The officer had already taken a general view and a close-up of the gallows, and was now trying to get a good side shot The hangmen looked nervous and tried to catch the commandant s eye

Hurry up then! the commandant shouted at the officer with the camera

At this, Tanya turned to him and addressing both him and the German soldiers cried

‘You re about to hang me, but I m not alone There are two hundred million of us, you can t hang us all My death will be avenged Soldiers, surrender before it s too late victory will be ours anyway! My death will be avenged

The local men and women wept Some turned away so as not to see what was about to happen

The hangman pulled at the rope and the noose tightened round Tanya s throat She strained at it with both hands, raised herself on tiptoe and, mustering all her strength, shouted

“Goodbye, comrades! Fight, don t be afraid

The hangman pushed at the bottom packing case with his steel-tipped boot, and it slid along the slippery, icy snow The top case toppled over and fell on the ground with a thud The crowd backed away in horror Someone screamed, and the echo of this scream rolled over the forest

She died in enemy captivity, on a nazi gallows betraying neither her sufferings nor her comrades by so much as a sound She died a martyr s death, she died like a hero, like the true daughter of a great people, who will never bow to any conqueror

May her memory live forever!

On New Year s eve, a crowd of drunken German soldiers pulled the clothes off the girl s body hanging from the gallows and bestially mutilated it The body, stabbed and hacked with knives hung in the centre of the village the whole of the next day and only in the evening did the commandant order the gallows to be pulled down The local people dug a hole in the frozen ground some distance away from the village, and buried the body in it

Soon afterwards, the Red Army, by then on the offensive, drove the Germans out of Petrishchevo

Thereafter soldiers on the march were to make a halt here in order to bow to the ground before her grave, to thank her parents for bringing up such a heroic daughter, her teachers for guiding her, and her comrades for steeling her spirit The story of her heroism was to spread throughout the vast Soviet land and millions of people were to cherish the memory of this remarkable girl

TANYA S REAL IDENTITY

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR posthumously conferred the title of Hero of the Soviet Union on partisan Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya a member of the Komsomol

Her feat was described in an article entitled Tanya printed in *Pravda* on January 27, 1942 Her real name was not known then She had not told it to her interrogators, nor to Praskovya Kulik On her way to Petrishchevo she had encountered a partisan from the Vereya detachment and told him her name was Tanya, thus concealing her real identity even from him

The identity of the girl who was hanged by the nazis in Petrishchevo was established by the Moscow Committee of the Komsomol

She was Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, aged 18, a tenth-form pupil at School No 201 in Moscow s Oktyabrsky district Zoya and her brother Alexander lived with their widowed mother, Lyubov Timofeyevna Kosmodemyanskaya, in house No 7, Alexandrovsky Proyezd, near the gardens of the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy

Zoya s friends describe her as a tall, slim girl, broad-shouldered, with bright, dark eyes and short dark hair She was very impressionable given to reverie, and blushed easily

When hearing about Zoya from her school friends and teachers, when reading her diaries, notes and school essays, what impresses one most is her extraordinary industriousness and perseverance, her stubborn persistence in attaining any goal she had set herself She read a lot copying down the passages she liked particularly, and was always well prepared for her literature lessons She had a harder time with mathematics, but she never gave up until she had thoroughly mastered a formula even if it took her hours of patient study

When Zoya was elected Komsomol group organiser of her form, she suggested they arrange free classes for semi-literate housewives

and gave herself heart and soul to the job The other boys and girls were very keen at first, but many of them soon lost interest because it involved too much travelling Zoya was bitterly disappointed She simply could not understand how anyone could be so daunted by obstacles as to go back on his word and fail in his duty

Her favourite subjects were Russian literature and Russian history, and in addition to the world of school where she was an ordinary Soviet schoolgirl, a good friend and an active Komsomol member, she had a world of her own peopled with her favourite literary and historical heroes Her friends sometimes accused her of being aloof, but this usually happened when Zoya was still living in a book she had just finished She would be absent-minded and unsociable, withdrawing into her private world of heroic characters

The glorious history of the Russian people described by Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoi, Belinsky, Turgenev, Chernyshevsky, Herzen and Nekrasov, was always in her mind It shaped her character inspired her dreams and actions, and filled her with an irresistible desire to do something heroic for the happiness of her people

Zoya copied whole pages of *War and Peace* into her notebook Her school essays on Ilya Muromets and Kutuzov were written with genuine feeling and profound understanding, and received top marks Her imagination was stirred by the tragic, self-sacrificing careers of Chernyshevsky and Taras Shevchenko, and like them, she dreamed of serving the sacred cause of the people

We have before us one of Zoya's notebooks in which she put down the thoughts of poets and writers that struck a chord in her own heart Here are a few of the entries

'Everything must be beautiful in man his face, his clothes, his soul and his thoughts (Chekhov)

'To be a Communist means to venture to think to wish and to dare' (Mayakovsky)

"Die rather than give a kiss without love (Chernyshevsky)

"I wouldn t stake ten Frenchmen against one Russian (Kutuzov)

'What a capacity for love, what humaneness there is in Gorky s *Children of the Sun*," Zoya jotted down in pencil, and further on 'In *Othello* we see a person s struggle for high ideals, truth and moral purity the theme of *Othello* is the triumph of real, great love"

Her thoughts on Lenin–the embodiment of our people s proud past, vigorous present, and radiant future–were worded with a peculiarly winning, childish sincerity These notes reflect her whole

being–pure in thought and always striving upward, to the realisation of the most noble ideals

Then came June 1941 Zoya took her exams and passed into the last, tenth form A few days later war broke out She wanted to be a soldier, and applied for active service, joining a sabotage unit

Her parting words to her mother were Don t cry, dear I ll either come back a hero or die a hero

Zoya was interviewed by the commander of the unit at the barracks He sat behind a huge desk in a large room that seemed very forbidding to her

You aren t afraid? he asked, peering searchingly into Zoya's face

No, I m not afraid, she replied

'But being alone in the forest at night is frightening, isn t it?'

Never mind

What if you fall into the hands of the Germans, and they torture you?

I ll take it

Her confidence persuaded the commander and he took her into his unit Zoya s dream of possessing a soldier s sword and shield had come true

In her last letter to her mother, dated November 17, she wrote

' Dear Mummy, how are you living now? How do you feel? I hope you're not ill Mummy, write me a few lines if you have a chance When I return from my assignment, I ll come home for a stay Yours,

Zoya '

And in her notebook she wrote this line from *Hamlet*

Adieu, adieu! remember me

The following day, together with a group of Komsomol partisans Zoya crossed the front line near the village of Obukhovo, and entered enemy-occupied territory

They lived in the forest for two weeks, going out on their various assignments at night, and sleeping or sitting round the fire in the daytime The privations and hardships of this existence were a great strain on some members of the group, but Zoya never complained and endured everything with fortitude

They had taken along enough food for five days, but they had to make it last for fifteen, and now they were cleaning up the crumbs It was time to go back, but Zoya felt she had accomplished too little, and decided to stay behind in order to try and get into Petrishchevo

Never mind if I die there, I ll take a dozen Germans along with me, she told her comrades

She started out with two other partisans, but was soon left by herself Undaunted, she spent two nights alone in the forest then made her way to the village and actually reached an important objective but was seized by the German sentry She manfully held out against a whole pack of nazis who tortured her with bestial cruelty She probably drew strength from her beloved historical Russian heroes and martyrs in those, her last hours on earth

Once, Zoya wrote in her school book about the legendary Russian *bogatyr* Ilya Muromets When the enemy begins to get the better of him, the Russian earth itself pours fresh strength into him ' In those fatal minutes, her native Soviet earth must have given Zoya that strength which was so amazing in a young girl

Even her enemies were compelled to acknowledge it Karl Beyerlein, an NCO who was present at the tortures to which Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya was subjected by Lt -Col Ruderer, commander of the 332nd Infantry Regiment of the 197th German Division was later taken prisoner, and this is what he wrote in his statement

'Your people s young heroine remained firm She did not know the meaning of the word betrayal She was blue from the cold and her wounds were bleeding, but she would say nothing

Zoya s last thoughts on the gallows were of her country And in her death hour she hailed the coming victory

The square was deserted immediately after the execution and none of the villagers came out of doors that day if they could help it Zoya s body hung there for a whole month, swinging in the wind Even in death her beautiful face kept its freshness and innocence, and wore an expression of profound peace People who had to walk past the gallows, lowered their heads and quickened their step When German units stopped at the village on their way through, the bestial Fritzes would surround the body and poke at it with sticks, roaring with laughter Then they moved on, and found more fun awaiting them a few kilometres away the bodies of two boys hung in front of the district hospital

The land occupied by the nazis, bristling with gallows and streaming with blood, screamed for vengeance

The Germans had to retreat from Petrishchevo in a hurry, and had no time to set fire to it Of all the neighbouring villages, it was the only one to survive There were people here who had witnessed the hitlerites' crime, and there was Zoya s grave

Zoya s story was passed by word of mouth to the villages liberated from the nazis Soldiers at the front dedicated poems to her

and fired at the enemy in her name People drew fresh strength from the thought of her A student of history wrote to *Pravda* at the time There are more trials in store for us, and if things become hard I shall re-read this tragic story and look once more into the beautiful, courageous face of the girl-partisan

The radiant image of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya shines like a star—a symbol of fortitude and honour

Konstantin Simonov

Konstantin Mikhailovich Simonov was born in Leningrad in 1915 and was educated at the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow He started out as a poet his first poems being published in 1934 From 1941 to 1945 he worked as a war correspondent on the staff of the Army newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star) He was with the advancing Soviet Army all the way from Moscow to Berlin and did his share of the fighting During the war Simonov wrote several cycles of poems the play *Russian People* the novel *Days and Nights* about the defenders of Stalingrad and numerous short stories Since the war he has achieved even greater popularity with his novels *The Living and the Dead* and *Men Are Not Born Soldiers* which have been translated into many languages

JUNE-DECEMBER

1

It was the 24th of June The train, for some reason made up of suburban coaches, rolled away from the darkened Byelorussian Station Blue lamps were burning We were not used to them yet The train was going to Minsk The passengers were mainly officers returning to their units from leave War was in its third day and everyone was hurrying westwards

Next to me sat a colonel of a tank battalion He was a short man with greying hair, and wore an Order of Lenin pinned on his tunic His son–Misha, I believe his name was–was going to the front with him The father had obtained permission from the People s Commissariat of Defence to take the sixteen-year-old boy along with him as a volunteer Father and son looked very much alike Both were short and stocky with stubborn chins and serious grey eyes

The train went no further than Borisov There were Germans ahead, a wrecked track, and complete uncertainty

There were several thousand officers and men assembled in the woods on the banks of the Berezina They too had been returning to their units, but the Germans had unexpectedly broken through to Borisov and cut them off

Wave upon wave of German strafing planes zoomed overhead They dropped bombs and machine-gunned us from sunrise to sunset, while field guns boomed incessantly ahead of us to the west All were from different units, all were strangers to one another, and no one knew what was happening But one person came forward who quickly rallied everyone together and established the necessary order It was the small colonel, my travelling companion, who became the life and soul of the group of men gathered in the woods near Borisov

He was the first to pronounce the words Take up defence positions He called the senior officers together, counted the weapons, divided the men up into companies and platoons, and the soldiers felt they were an army once more

Some guns were found, along with several machine-guns and men were sent back to Borisov for ammunition We dug trenches and slits, and climbed in with our rifles

There were all sorts of different people there Lying to the left of me were an artillery captain and a military lawyer and to the right there were two civilians, both lorry drivers

I shall never forget the colonel s son The boy did everything he could to make himself useful His rifle slung on his shoulder, he ran about, carrying messages, fetching food, water and cartridges In his rare free moments he observed his father admiringly out of the corner of his eye The boy was glad that he was fighting, and proud that in that critical hour it was his father who proved to be the most resolute of all the men in uniform there

He was right He had every reason to be proud of his father The colonel acted as if nothing unusual had happened as if all these different people were not total strangers to one another but a regular regiment that he had been commanding for at least three years He gave the orders in a calm subdued voice which had a metallic ring and commanded instant obedience I heard his name mentioned several times, and I knew it then, but could not remember it later

I parted with the colonel the next day and never saw him again

In November, when I was at the Karelian Front, on the Rybachy Peninsula, we received an old batch of newspapers from Moscow which had been held up for a long time On the front page of one of them I don t remember which there was a photograph with the caption Colonel Lizyukov Hero of the Soviet Union, Commander of the First Guards Motorised Infantry Division, receiving the Guards colours

The colonel was wearing winter uniform a short, stocky man with a stubborn chin

I recognised him at once Yes, of course, he was the man from near Borisov I remembered the name I had heard then and later forgotten Colonel Lizyukov, of course I wished his son were there in the picture with him I wanted to see the two of them together as they had been then, in June

It all came back to me most vividly in December, now that I had travelled along many of the roads leading to the west in the wake of the retreating Germans, had seen how ruthlessly they were being

annihilated Now that we had learnt to beat them we could at last permit ourselves to cast our minds back to what was too painful to remember before

I now recalled the first hard battles of June and July, the first painful reverses and lessons, the blood-washed roads along which we retreated and along which we were now returning

And today one pronounces with a special feeling of pride and gratitude the names of those people who were the soul of our armies then watching whom in those difficult days one believed that all this was going to end, that we would begin to win and come back that we were definitely going to win and come back We did not know when, but watching these people we knew for certain that it would be so

When Russia was ravished by the Tatar invasion when her towns were burnt down to the ground and flooded with the blood of their inhabitants the people bequeathed to us in their ballads the unforgettable memory of the darkest despair and grief But all the chroniclers of Novgorod Suzdal, Vladimir and Ryazan also tell the story of Yevpaty Kolovrat a Ryazan *bogatyr,* who, coming home from the wars and finding his town razed to the ground collected a small force and set off in pursuit of the enemy host He overtook the Tatars, killed a great multitude of them, and in this unequal battle died a hero s death together with all his small force

Russia freed herself from the Tatar yoke there was the battle at Kulikovo and victory came, but alongside the names of the victors, alongside the name of Dmitry Donskoi, lives the memory of Yevpaty Kolovrat the popular hero of those first tragic days of the Tatar invasion

His name has come down to us because in those grim days of bloodshed and subjugation, the feat he performed was not just a consolation, not just something to be proud of, but also an earnest of ultimate victory

Times and enemies change–I do not want to draw any historical comparisons–but the heart of the people does not It remains as staunch as ever in times of trial and as grateful to those who in such times proved purer and stronger in spirit than their fellows

It will be like that now The names of the victors will not overshadow in the memory of the people the names of the heroes of those June, July and August battles I remember very well how at the time of those painful reverses we journalists who through our newspapers had to tell the public what was happening at the front, sought and found those whose stories engendered faith in victory

The middle of July Mogilev A single wooden bridge spanned the Dnieper There was not a gun on it, not a single anti-aircraft gun We crossed over to the western bank, to the regiment which was defending Mogilev A hard, bloody battle had been fought that day The regiment had smashed forty German tanks, but had almost been bled white itself In the evening we had a talk with Colonel Kutepov, the commanding officer He was a very tall lean slightly awkward man who had been many years in the Army but who looked as if he had never worn uniform until the day before When things were particularly grim his unshaven bristly tired deadly tired face, would light up with an unexpectedly gentle child ish smile

We told him about the bridge There was not a single anti-aircraft gun on it we said and if the Germans destroyed it from the air the regiment would be cut off on this side of the Dnieper

Oh well Kutepov suddenly smiled his childish smile Oh well he repeated in a soft quiet voice as if he were speaking of the most commonplace of things Let them The others may retreat but we have decided to stay here and die It s the decision of the whole regiment We have already discussed the matter

To this day I remember Kutepov standing at his command post and the messenger running up to him at the double

Comrade Colonel there are thirty more tanks on our right flank he reported, gasping for breath

What more tanks? Where? one of the officers standing nearby asked the colonel in alarm Apparently, he had only caught the word tanks but had missed how many there were

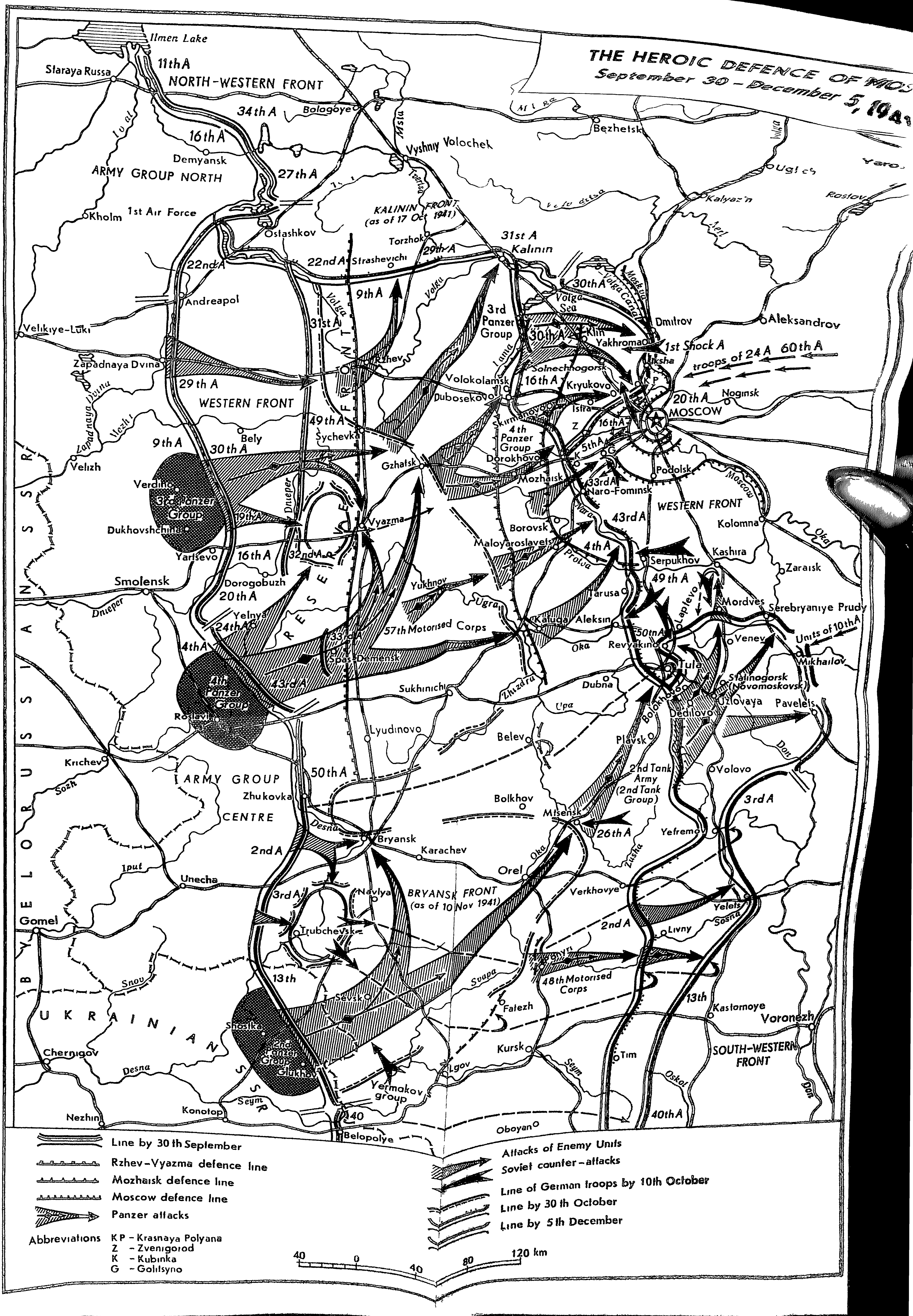
More tanks? Ah yes, there are three lousy little ones on the right flank Kutepov replied smiling

To this day I remember the worry in his eyes and his smile He looked worried because there were thirty tanks on the right flank and measures had to be taken He smiled because the officer he was answering was going to the left flank, and it would be better for him to believe that there were three and not thirty German tanks on the right

I don t know, maybe he did wrong from the military point of view but looking at him in that tense moment I knew we would win We would definitely win it could not be otherwise

2

How the war roads have changed! I shall never forget the Minsk Highway with its endless stream of refugees They were dressed in whatever they had on when they jumped out of bed and they



THE HEROIC DEFENCE OF MOS
September 30 – December 5, 194
Ilmen Lake
Staraya Russa
11th A
NORTH-WESTERN FRONT
34th A
Bologoye
16th A
Demyansk
ARMY GROUP NORTH
27th A
Vyshniy Volochek
Bezhetsk
Uglich
Kalyazin
Rostov
1st Air Force
Kholm
Ostashkov
KALININ FRONT (as of 17 Oct 1941)
Torzhok
31st A
Kalinin
22nd A
Strashevichi
29th A
30th A
Volga Sea
Moscow-Volga Canal
Andreapol
9th A
31st A
3rd Panzer Group
Dmitrov
Aleksandrov
Velikiye-Luki
30th A
Klin
Yakhroma
1st Shock A
troops of 24 A 60th A
Zapadnaya Dvina
Rzhev
Volokolamsk
Solnechnogorsk
16th A
Kryukovo
KP
29th A
Dubosekovo
Istra
20th A
Noginsk
MOSCOW
WESTERN FRONT
49th A
Sychevka
Skirmanovo
4th Panzer Group
Z
16th A
Bely
9th A
30th A
5th A
K
G
Velizh
Gzhatsk
Dorokhovo
Mozhaisk
Podolsk
Verdino
3rd Panzer Group
19th A
Naro-Fominsk
33rd A
43rd A
WESTERN FRONT
Dukhovshchina
Vyazma
Borovsk
Kolomna
Yartsevo
16th A
32nd A
Maloyaroslavets
4th A
Kashira
Serpukhov
Zaraisk
Smolensk
Dorogobuzh
20th A
Yukhnov
49th A
Tarusa
Mordves
Serebryaniye Prudy
Yelnya
24th A
57th Motorised Corps
Kaluga
Aleksin
Laptevo
4th A
33rd A
Spas-Demensk
50th A
Revyakino
Venev
Units of 10th A
43rd A
Tula
Mikhailov
4th Panzer Group
Sukhinichi
Dubna
Stalinogorsk (Novomoskovsk)
Uzlovaya
Pavelets
Roslavl
Bolokhovo
Dedilovo
Lyudinovo
Belev
Plavsk
Krichev
ARMY GROUP CENTRE
50th A
2nd Tank Army (2nd Tank Group)
Volovo
Zhukovka
Bolkhov
Mtsensk
3rd A
26th A
Yefremov
2nd A
Bryansk
Karachev
Orel
Unecha
3rd A
Navlya
BRYANSK FRONT (as of 10 Nov 1941)
Verkhovye
Yelets
Gomel
Trubchevsk
2nd A
Livny
Ponyri
48th Motorised Corps
13th
Sevsk
Fatezh
13th
Kastornoye
Voronezh
UKRAINIAN SSR
BYELORUSSIAN SSR
Shostka
2nd Panzer Group
Glukhov
Kursk
Tim
SOUTH-WESTERN FRONT
Chernigov
Lgov
Yermakov group
Konotop
40
40th A
Nezhin
Belopolye
Oboyan
Line by 30th September
Rzhev–Vyazma defence line
Mozhaisk defence line
Moscow defence line
Panzer attacks
Attacks of Enemy Units
Soviet counter-attacks
Line of German troops by 10th October
Line by 30th October
Line by 5th December
Abbreviations KP – Krasnaya Polyana
Z – Zvenigorod
K – Kubinka
G – Golitsyno
40 0 40 80 120 km

Maybe we needn t go? Maybe the Germans won t come here? And there was hope in their eyes again

But then more military cars passed them, heading east and the refugees followed them with sorrowful looks They whipped up their horses in a hurry to get on And they kept asking where they should go as far as Roslavl or farther east?

December The same roads In Odoyev we were surrounded by people who had just returned to the town They wanted to know when our armies would take Minsk, when they d take Belev Their relatives had stayed behind there, and they believed they were going to see them soon, if they had survived of course They were quite sure that Belev would be taken, all they wanted to know was when, how soon Very soon, we told them We, too, believed it And then they d start asking us about Kaluga, Orel, and other towns

'When? they repeated, and looked at the soldiers with firm faith in their eyes

These looks made our mounted soldiers instinctively spur on their horses and go at a fast trot to the town gates whence the road led west

3

I remember being at the headquarters of our Far North army one night in November when half the sky was aglow with the northern lights, and going outside for a smoke and a breath of the frosty air A man from the Special Department came out with me and suddenly, as though remembering something, he said to me happily

You know, there ll be some interesting material for you We ve captured three German officers

What rank? I asked

I don t know yet

You mean they re still in the division?

No

The regiment then?

"No You see you see, the thing is, they re not here at all yet, those prisoners They're still there, in the German rear They were captured at a spot sixty kilometres behind the enemy lines, between their Corps and Divisional HQs Fifteen of our frontier-guards went there and seized them They sent a radio message that they were bringing three German officers and were going to cross the front line with their prisoners in two or three days' time So you and I will have to wait a little

I remembered this episode just now because it implied more than the boldness of a handful of brave men It implied the confidence which has been growing stronger in our army with every month In July we were not taking any German prisoners forty miles behind enemy lines Yet by November we were doing it And what is more it was taken for granted, and no one was particularly surprised that such a thing could be done

I saw the prisoners three days later They were wearing felt boots which the frontier-guards had taken along with them specially It was plain common sense and not excessive soft-heartedness that had made them put the felt boots on the prisoners–it was easier to walk them that way These three officers from the famous Cretan Alpine Chasseurs Division looked extremely dazed and sorry for themselves They had never had to fight like that, and they were not accustomed to being taken prisoner like that They were told they and many of their colleagues would have to get used to it soon They said nothing They kept silent not from arrogance not from a sense of injured pride as had been the case before but simply because they had nothing to say, because they were spiritually numb

How these soldiers of the invincible army have changed in six months! In July it was impossible to say which of them were brave and which were cowards All human qualities were drowned by arrogance–by the insolence common to invaders everywhere When they saw that they were not going to be beaten or shot, they at once put on a bold front They believed the war would be won in another fortnight they looked upon their imprisonment as a sort of enforced leave and thought they were being treated decently only from fear from fear of vengeance to come

But that s all a thing of the past Nowadays some of them tremble and weep, hurriedly blubbering all they know, while others–the rare few–keep sullenly silent locked in despair The army of insolent blusterers changed remarkably in those days of defeat

It is a perfectly natural thing to happen in an army that has become used to easy victories and is suffering defeat for the first time

The Germans are retreating They are fighting, but retreating just the same Hitting back, but on the run

An operations map is spread out on the general's table I have seen many such maps since the war began but how different this one looks! D you remember the maps of July, August and October? There were big blue arrows and small red semi-circles The picture has changed Now there are red arrows, drawn with a bold, firm

hand, and small blue semi-circles drawing away from them The Germans are retreating The red arrows are moving west further and further away from Moscow cutting deeper and deeper into the blue lines of the enemy They smash these lines shattering them The blue semi-circles grow smaller and smaller breaking up into regiments, battalions and companies

The map I am looking at shows a deep thirty-mile wedge driven by our armies into the retreating German divisions Whole regiments of Germans are still at large in our rear roads are still blocked every day by small groups of tommy-gunners but our divisions are forging ahead convinced that they will encircle the Germans and wipe them out For a minute I try to imagine seeing this map in July or August If we had seen it then it would have seemed that it was ourselves who were surrounded here and not the Germans

The encircling force is also the encircled to a certain extent to take an old truth However what matters here is not so much the number of regiments or divisions one or the other side has but which side does the attacking which side believes it is encircling the other and which believes it is itself being encircled

Something much more important than the capture of a couple of dozen villages or towns has taken place A tremendous magnificent change has taken place in the psychology of our troops

Our army has learnt how to conquer the Germans And even when its regiments find themselves in difficulties even when the scales of war seem about to tip in the enemy's favour even then our soldiers feel they are the conquerors and they continue to advance and rout the enemy

The Germans have reached a similar turning point in reverse They are obsessed by the fear of encirclement they are retreating they constantly strive to straighten out the line of the front and they are frightened by no more than a handful of men penetrating behind their lines men who firmly believe in victory

An officer came in and reported to the colonel that a platoon of German tommy-gunners had appeared in their rear

'Oh well' he said "Some of our people will come up behind us and mop them up Our job is to forge ahead only ahead' Making no further mention of the enemy platoon the colonel gave the order to advance

The enemy must be routed and will be routed whatever happens All our people know this they know it and what is more important they feel it with all their hearts They are driving the Germans back and they will go on encircling them and driving them back along

the highroads and across country, across the fields deep in snow where no vehicle can pass where legs sink in knee-deep, where progress is devilishly hard to make but then when you re advancing you discover you possess an extraordinary strength and find a second wind We are imposing our will on the Germans, we are becoming the masters of the situation They are going to emerge from encirclement into villages razed to the ground, into impenetrable forests and they are going to freeze to death in their hundreds where today they are freezing in their dozens They are going to be killed by artillery shells and submachine-gun bullets and as they retreat they are going to be killed by the women and old men with stakes and pitch forks as other invaders were killed on the same roads in 1812

They need expect no mercy We have learnt how to conquer but this lesson was too costly and too cruel for us now to have mercy on the enemy

Pyotr Pavlenko

Pyotr Andreyevich Pavlenko was born in Lenin grad in 1899 He fought in the Civil War served in the Red Army and later worked in the diplomatic corps and as a newspaper correspondent His first book *Asian Stories* was published in 1929 He was on active service throughout the Great Patriotic War The novel *Happiness* written after the war won him a State Prize

The story included in this volume was written in 1942 and is based on factual material about the defence of Sevastopol

Pyotr Pavlenko died in 1951

LAST WISH

A marine of the Black Sea Fleet fell gravely wounded on the battlefield in the midst of an attack A mine splinter had torn open his chest and death was no more than ten minutes away Nevertheless, he tried to get to his feet, and gathering his last remaining strength managed to raise his body a little and take a look about him The fighting was moving away The signallers and sappers were hurrying forward in the wake of the last line of advancing marines He did not call out to them But then he caught sight of a man with a movie camera and called out to him The man hurried over, slapping his pockets to locate his first-aid packet The wounded marine waved his hand as if to say never mind that

Take a picture of me he shouted 'I ll die without having said anything Take a picture of me!

Right!

The photographer trained his camera on the dying man who raised his bleeding, trembling hand, and in a terrible, loud voice as if he were calling his whole company, shouted into the lens

Men, don t spare yourselves! You ve got to realise Glasha, don t cry for me! My little ones, remember

And only then did the photographer realise that the marine had wanted a talking picture He wanted to be heard So let it be as he wanted His will is sacred

Alexander Krivitsky

Alexander Krivitsky a correspondent of *Krasnaya Zvezda* was the first to write the story of the immortal stand of the 28 Panfilov men who held out for four hours against 50 enemy tanks halting their advance on Moscow The article which appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda* in 1941 was reprinted several times as a separate publication It has been abridged for inclusion in this collection

The events of the Great Patriotic War have been described by Alexander Krivitsky in several books including *Night and Sunrise* and *Never To Be Forgotten*

DUBOSEKOVO HALT

There isn t a person in this country in whose heart the name does not strike a chord Children learn about it from their school readers and their fathers and elder brothers remember the time when it was on everybody s lips Dubosekovo Halt The place where twenty-eight men from Panfilov s Guards Division–youngsters, most of them–courageously engaged in unequal battle with fifty enemy tanks I had the privilege of being the first reporter to describe this feat It was soon to become known to the whole world

Dubosekovo Halt is one of those names that have gone down forever in the history of the Great Patriotic War It is a sacred piece of land that has become a symbol of Soviet military valour

On the 147th day of war the enemy launched their second all-out attack on Moscow Operation Typhoon it was called by General Halder, the German Chief of Staff More armoured divisions were pitched against Moscow than had been used in the invasion of France in the spring of 1940, where ten or eleven were in action along the whole front from the sea to Sedan Even then the world had been staggered by such an unheard of concentration of armour

Hitler issued a proclamation to his armies in which he announced the beginning of the last decisive ' offensive The way has been prepared for the final, shattering blow which will crush the enemy before winter sets in, the order stated

It was November 16, 1941 German tanks launched full-scale attacks on the right wing of our Western Front, the 2nd Panzer Army resumed its fierce attacks to the south-east of Tula, while the 4th Army, the enemy s strongest shock force thrust forward in the centre

Do you remember those days?

To the north-west of the capital the Germans got as far as the Moscow-Volga canal and forced it in the Yakhroma area By-passing Tula they came close to Kashira

On one of those November days the editor handed me four printed lines from a report which had come in together with many others from the political section of one of the divisions defending Moscow The report said that a group of soldiers, headed by their political instructor Diyev, had repulsed an attack by fifty enemy tanks It did not give the names of the soldiers, nor the exact area of the battle There was only the name of the political instructor mention of Dubosekovo and the fact itself

After the editor had checked the information with the division and the Army he assigned me to work on it

On November 16th, at Dubosekovo Halt, twenty-eight men headed by political instructor Diyev repulsed an attack by enemy tanks advancing in two echelons of twenty and thirty One of the men got frightened and made to surrender and was shot by his comrades without any order being given The twenty-seven men and Diyev died a hero s death, holding off the enemy tanks for four hours and crippling eighteen of them

I sat down at once and wrote an editorial, calling it The Behest of 28 Heroes'

This old editorial published in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on November 28th is given below The article contains nothing beyond the information given in the report on which it was based I cannot say that it is well-written But it was this editorial which first told people the story, even if not fully of the feat performed by the 28 heroes of Panfilov s Division

Here it is

In these grim days, when the fate of Moscow is being decided when the enemy onslaught is at its height the whole purpose of the life and struggle of the Red Army men who are defending Moscow is to stop the enemy s advance at all costs, to bar the way to the Germans Not a step back is the supreme law for us Victory or death—such is our militant motto

And where this motto has become the will of our men where our soldiers are determined to defend Moscow to their last drop of blood, to hold their positions or die—there the Germans are unable to advance

A few days ago, on the approaches to Moscow, over fifty

enemy tanks advanced on the positions held by 29 men from General Panfilov s Guards Division The panzers came right up the trenches where our men were concealed

Resistance might have seemed madness Twenty-nine men against fifty armoured monsters! Where, in what war in what age had such an unequal battle been fought? But the Soviet soldiers engaged the enemy without hesitation They did not flinch they did not retreat We have nowhere to retreat, they told themselves

Only one out of the twenty-nine turned coward When the Germans confident of easy victory shouted Surrender! only one of the men raised his hands A volley of shots roared out in response Without any previous agreement, without an order several of our soldiers fired at the coward and traitor It was Motherland punishing the apostate It was the Red Army Guards destroying without hesitation the one among them who by his treason wanted to defame 28 courageous men

After that political instructor Diyev calmly gave the order Not a step back! A fierce battle ensued The fearless men used anti-tank rifles and petrol bottles against the enemy tanks!

At that critical hour the heroes, though a mere handful were not fighting alone With them were our heroes of old the glorious past of our people who have never submitted to a foreign conqueror With them were the brilliant victories of the Russian Guards thus attested by Field-Marshal Saltykov in his reports to St Petersburg during the Seven Years War with the Prussians As for Russia s Guards, I can say that none can stand up against them and they themselves look upon their wounds with the disdain of lions With them were the glory and honour of the Red Army, and its banners which in those moments seemed to bless them With them was the people s blessing for a relentless struggle against the enemy

Our ranks were thinning, but even in that tragic moment when death tried to close the heroes eyes forever, they continued to strike back at the enemy Eighteen enemy tanks stood crippled and motionless on the field of battle The fighting went on for four hours and for four hours the nazis armoured fist could not break through the positions defended by the Guardsmen But finally they ran out of ammunition there were no more anti-tank bullets and no more hand-grenades

The nazi tanks crept up to the trench The Germans jumped out of the hatches wanting to take the surviving heroes alive and finish them off Political instructor Diyev grouped his remaining comrades together and led them into the attack Our men fought remembering the old motto The Guards may die, but never

surrender They fought on till none of the 28 were left They died but they did not let the enemy through Our regiment came up in the nick of time, and the enemy tank force got no further

We do not know what the heroes last thoughts were but in their fearlessness and courage we read a behest to us the living Their voice, which calls forth a resounding undying echo in the hearts of Soviet people, says to us We have laid our lives on the altar of our Motherland Do not weep over our bodies Grit your teeth and be strong! We knew what we were braving death for we have fulfilled our soldiers duty we barred the way to the enemy Go into battle and remember it s either victory or death You have no choice, just as we hand none We died, but victory was ours!

The twenty-eight valiant Guardsmen from General Panfilov s Division have bequeathed to us dauntlessness and firmness staunchness and a contempt for death in the name of victory over our mortal enemy We shall carry out this sacred bequest to the end We shall defend Moscow we shall defeat Hitler s Germany and the radiant light of our victory shall forever illumine the heroism of the Soviet warriors who fell on the field of battle

The next morning Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin rang up our editorial office and said

It makes my heart bleed to hear of our men dying The truth of war is hard to bear, but without truth it s even harder But since it s war, let s make war properly, as Lenin used to say Your giving prominence to heroes is a good thing We ought to find out their names Try and do it Heroes must not remain nameless

That same night I left for the front It was but a forty-five minute car ride from the editorial office The division in which the 28 had served was in Nakhabino being re-formed It was the division whose commander, General I V Panfilov I knew personally He had been killed shortly before my arrival, I learnt Colonel Serebryakov, the Chief of Staff, told me quite definitely that he had never heard of any political instructor by the name of Diyev Nor could the division commissar Yegorov remember any such person And yet the division had fought near Dubosekovo Halt on the dates mentioned in the political section s report Still no one knew Diyev

What could it possibly mean?

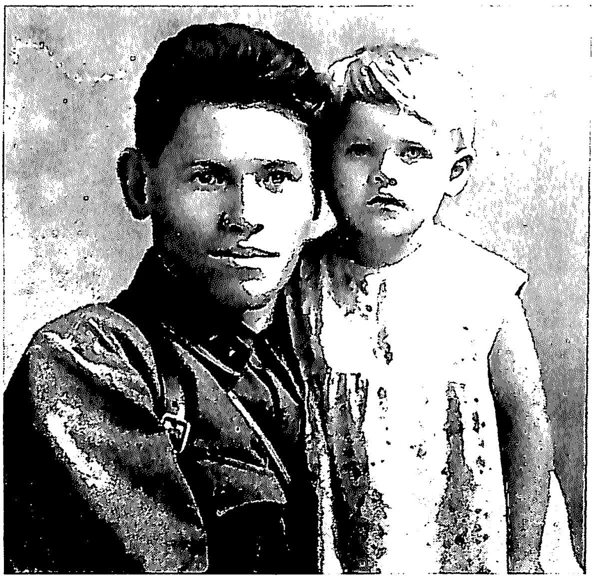
True, the division had just emerged from many weeks of heavy fighting, and its casualties had been extremely high The name of a company political instructor might well have been forgotten, of



General Ivan Konev hero of the Battle of Moscow



General Ivan Panfilov (left), commander of the 8th Guards Infantry Division



Political instructor Vassily Klochkov with his daughter before leaving for the front



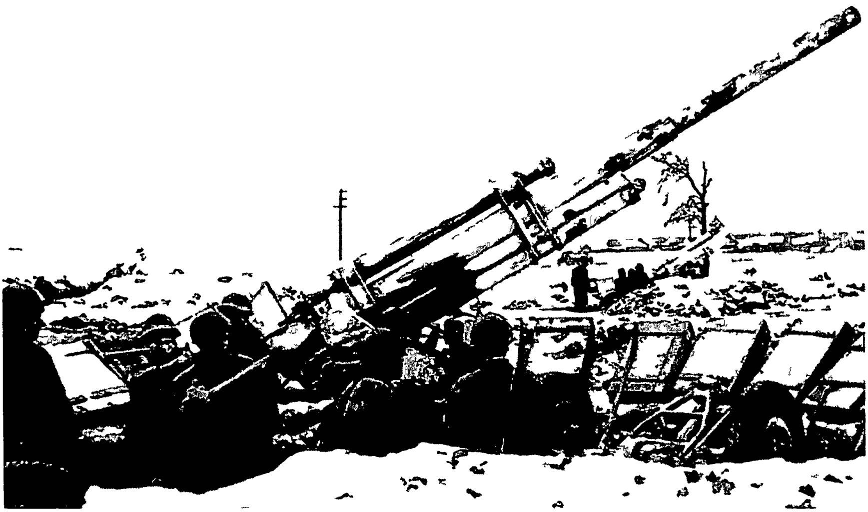




General Lev Dovator (left), Commander of the 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps



Katyusha rocket launchers



Artillery emplacement



Soviet writer Alexander Bek (left) with the hero of his novel **Volokolamsk Highway** Baurjan Momysh-Uly (centre)



Musical interlude

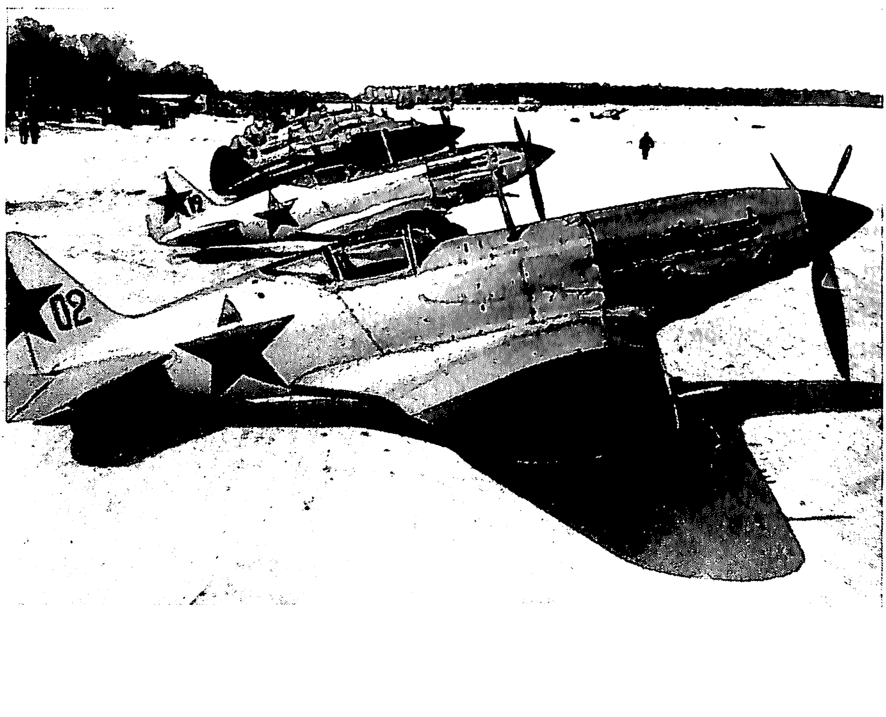


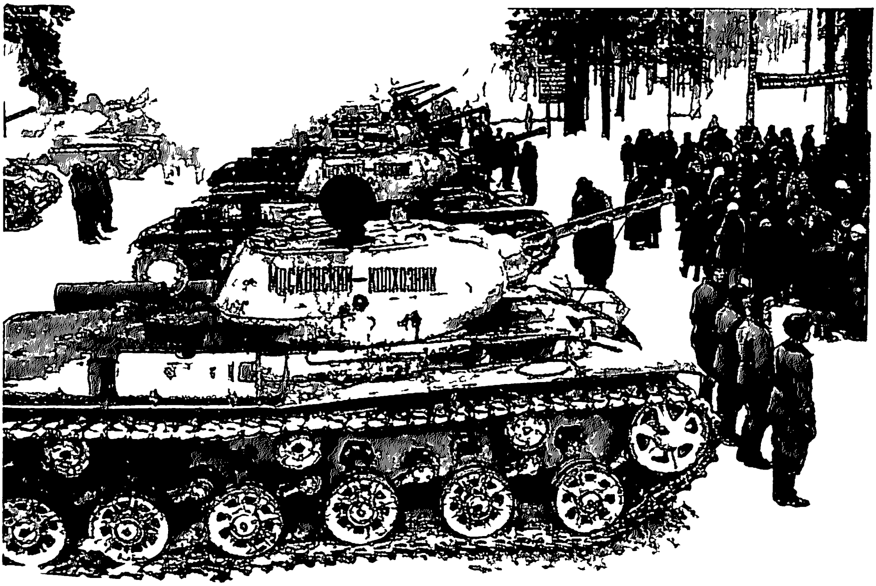
Writer Pyotr Pavlenko (first right) visits the wounded





Fighter pilot Victor Talalikhin, Hero of the Soviet Union. First to ram enemy bomber on night of August 7, 1941. Killed in action October the same year

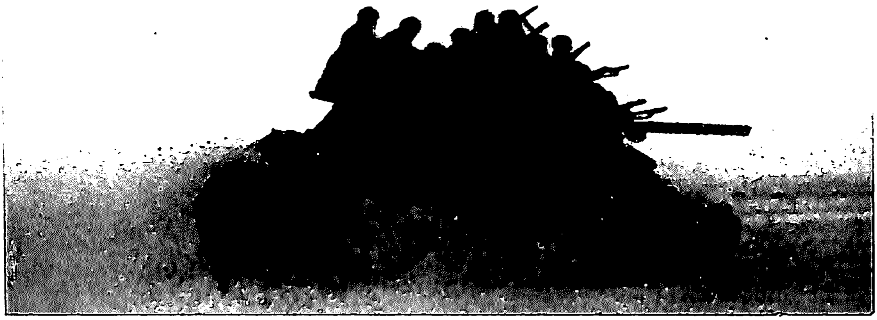




Tanks paid for by donations from collective-farm workers Moscow Region preparing to leave for front



General Dmitry Lelyushenko Commander of the 30th Army





General Mikhail Katukov, Commander of the 1st Tank Guards Brigade



Ivan Lyubushkin, Hero of the Soviet Union



Alexander Burda, Hero of the Soviet Union, Commander of tank platoon



Captain Gusev, Commander of tank battalion



Back at last!



The cathedral at New Jerusalem near Moscow after the enemy was driven out



Vandalism: the Tchaikovsky Museum in Klin



The Tolstoi Museum at Yasnaya Polyana





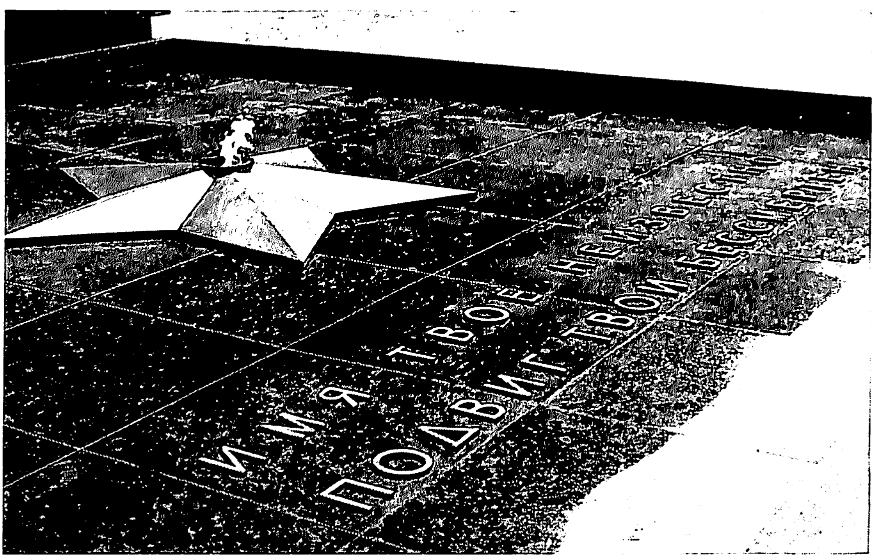


December 1941 west of Moscow.
The end of Operation Typhoon









To the memory of the fallen

course in the terrible excitement of those grim days and sleepless nights, in the fearful tension and the inevitable confusion caused by the loss of so many men and the arrival of reinforcements. But, after all someone must know him, surely.

Towards the end of the day, by sheer chance, I got to talking with Captain Gundilovich from Kaprov's regiment. He had heard me asking about Diyev, but he did not know what had brought me there.

Why Diyev, of course, my company political instructor, he said. His real name was Klochkov, and Diyev was a nickname given him by a Ukrainian soldier because he was always on the go always doing something—it's from the Ukrainian verb diye—doing. Ah, Klochkov, Klochkov, what a heroic chap he was! D'you know he and his men barred the way to fifty panzers near Dubosekovo.

Everyone in the division knew Klochkov. I returned to Moscow and wrote an article in which I named all the twenty-eight men and gave a detailed account of their feat.

* *

It was the summer of 1942. Dubosekovo Halt, there it was again. If you walk a little to the right, a hundred yards or so, you come to the spot where the Panfilov men pitched their strength against the German tanks. We had been there once before, when the earth was covered with a thick, gleaming pall of snow, and Captain Gundilovich had alone been able to locate just where our men had met their end, where the German armoured avalanche had smashed into the barrier of invisible steel.

The earth lay denuded now, and we had the whole scene of the battle before us. Spring waters had undermined the mud walls of the dugout, and the roof of logs had turned black from the heavy rains and collapsed. The edges and floor of the trench had already become overgrown with grass, bluebells, pale-yellow cole and green spurge.

The men had stood here. From here they had climbed over the ice-covered breastwork to meet the oncoming tanks. Maybe Klochkov-Diyev fell to the ground mortally wounded over there, where the wind was ruffling the thin bushes. And over there had stood the smoking monsters they had hit. In the article I wrote then, in 1942, I said: From here from this meadow near the small Russian village of Nelidovo, we saw in our mind's eye the glory of the 28 heroes rising over our country like a proud obelisk to fearlessness. Their feat has already been borne aloft on the wings of

legend, and we are the contemporaries of the epos arising round their names

Later, it transpired that four of the twenty-eight had survived Gravely wounded, they had been taken to a first-aid post and had then gone on for lengthy treatment in different hospitals These men, who had arisen from the dead—Grigory Shamyakin Illarion Vasilyev, Ivan Shadrin and Dmitry Timofeyev—received the Gold Stars of Heroes of the Soviet Union

Every inch of our soil is precious to us, whether it is the Kursk black soil that steams in the spring, or the rough rocks of the Altai Mountains We love all the highways and byways, every corner of Russia, but the places connected with the deeds of Russia s sons are imprinted forever in the memory of the people—the places watered by the sweat of peaceful toil or the blood shed in battle

And that is why the words Dubosekovo Halt instantly bring to mind those men whose names are forever associated with this tiny corner of our native land, nondescript but immeasurably precious to us

Alexander Bek

Alexander Bek a well known Soviet writer was born in 1902 in Saratov the son of a doctor He fought in the Civil War and it was then in 1919 that he had his first story published The most popular of his many stories and novels is *Volokolamsk Highway* based on factual material about the heroic defence of Moscow in 1941 Its hero Battalion Commander Baurjan Momysh Uly is a living person He also appears in the story The Map included in this collection

THE MAP

An old map made up of several smaller sheets stuck together was brought from the regimental safe, and when it was spread out it turned out to be not the usual square shape but a long strip the length of the whole table The light from a ceiling lamp shone straight down on the faint pattern of topographical signs, marked with blue and red pencil lines The scale of the map was one centimetre to the kilometre

During the Battle of Moscow the area shown on the map was called the Volokolamsk direction General Panfilov s men fought here and now the glorious history of the division was being reconstructed for its forthcoming anniversary Many of the officers assembled that evening in the office of Baurjan Momysh-Uly, the commander of the regiment knew the map by heart at one end of it there was Volokolamsk, and at the other–Moscow

One of them picked up the end hanging over the edge of the table and asked I say why has this bit been torn off? Why isn t Moscow here?

Everyone looked at the map and saw that only a narrow strip remained of the last section The edge was neat, but the paper was torn in the middle where the word ' Kryukovo –the station and the village–was written twice in different scripts

There s a story to this map, said Momysh-Uly Don t you know it?

He looked inquiringly at everyone in turn with his black, wide-set eyes, but it appeared that no one knew the story, and everybody was keen to hear it

Remember Sulima my aide? Momysh-Uly said "He could have told it well When did we get the order to retreat to Kryukovo?

On the 29th

That s right, on the 29th of November 1941 That day Sulima brought me the order to retreat and take up defensive positions in Kryukovo I got out the map but couldn t find Kryukovo on it I then found the next section and unfolded it There it was And there, right beside it was a riot of topographical signs which meant Moscow I had to work out the route and give orders and instead of that I just sat staring at all those squares crosses lines and the clearly discernible outlines of Moscow s angular and circular thoroughfares

Comrade Commander the battalions are waiting for orders Sulima said to me in a quiet voice

That blue-eyed boy had a sensitive soul I looked at him and saw that he understood what I was feeling then As all of you know I m a Kazakh, and Sulima was a Ukrainian Neither of us had ever lived in Moscow, but something gripped both our hearts like a vice when we saw before us the map of Moscow, laid out on the table as the area of operations I covered Moscow with my sleeve marked out the route and told Sulima to assemble the men Sulima went out and I stared at the map again Then I got out my curvimeter and measured the distance It was a little more than twenty kilometres from Kryukovo to the outskirts of Moscow Comrades all of you know the commander s rule to work out a plan of action for the worst contingency What s twenty or thirty kilometres? One single spurt and there d be fighting in the streets I sat there like this

Momysh-Uly clutched his head in his hands and stared as though in deep reflection or grief at a point on the map The light was focused on his gleaming mop of unruly black hair No one stirred not a throat was cleared nothing broke the silence

I sat there like that, Momysh-Uly resumed, straightening up I sat there like that staring at the huge black semi-circle spreading over from the next section of the map I m sure all of you understand just how I felt–picturing the enemy in Moscow I looked at the map and saw overturned trams and trolleybuses dangling telegraph wires, dead soldiers and civilians lying in the streets and German lieutenants in dress uniform, with white gloves, canes and everything, strolling about with the insolent smirks of victors on their faces I remembered the German prisoners saying with a cowardly but nasty smile Volokolamsk-Moskau

Surely that gang couldn t triumph over us, I was thinking I pored over the map, deliberating on the worst possible eventuality and searching for some place between Kryukovo and Moscow where

we could take a firm stand But I didn t find it Kryukovo was our last chance

I don t remember how long I sat there like that Sulima came back and reported that the unit was assembled I usually folded the map like this–from the east to the west–so that when I spread it out I had the Volokolamsk and the Leningrad highways before me I folded it differently this time Where Kryukovo ended I ran my finger hard against the edge, so it would no longer open up there My fingernail got caught and I made a tear in the paper

There were various papers lying on my table I got up and looked them through, putting some in my field bag and giving others to Sulima The last thing I picked up was the map, and I must have done it awkwardly because it suddenly came unfolded and once again I saw that huge black semi-circle which I didn't want to see I told Sulima to hand me a penknife, and then sat down again and very neatly cut through the edge, the way you cut a new book, and cut off all that part to the east of Kryukovo

Burn it I told Sulima, giving him the bit of paper

Burn it? he asked incredulously

Yes, burn it, I repeated

He looked at me in dismay for a second, and then a resolute look came into his handsome blue eyes He had understood me What was the purpose of a map? Orientation And Sulima understood that we would not need to find our way about among the roads, streams, villages or anything else that lay behind Kryukovo He understood that we'd either beat the Germans back or die at Kryukovo

'Sulima put a match to the bit of paper, and in silence we both watched it turn into black ash, with no trace left of the names of roads or cart-tracks leading to Moscow And then You all know what happened then

Momysh-Uly fell silent

The small light shone brightly down on the outspread map Someone was holding the end that hung over the edge of the table Yes, they all knew that the Germans had got no further than Kryukovo What happened at Kryukovo and other points of what was then the Western Front was referred to in the foreign press as the miracle at Moscow"

Alexander Fadeyev

Alexander Fadeyev is an outstanding Soviet writer who is well known in many countries. He was born in Kimry in 1901, into a peasant family which included several active revolutionaries. His childhood was spent in the Far East. At 17, he joined the Communist Party, worked underground and then joined the partisans. Later, he served in the Red Army. After the Civil War he studied at a mining institute, and worked for a newspaper.

His first novel *The Rout,* dealing with the Civil War in the Far East, brought him instant and well-deserved fame, and was translated in dozens of countries. During the war, Fadeyev worked as front-line correspondent for *Pravda.* In 1945-46 he wrote his novel *The Young Guard* which has since run into dozens of editions both in the Soviet Union and abroad.

Alexander Fadeyev, whose life ended tragically in 1956, was a courageous fighter against fascism and aggression, an active champion of the peace movement and a passionate advocate of friendship between nations.

NAMED AFTER KIROV

They say a farmer is attached to the soil and to his native village And of course it s very true But I ll tell you this our Russian worker is no less attached to his factory and his work I have been at the works here since 1914 when I was no more than a boy My father before me and many of our family worked here too I shall never leave the works of my own free will unless of course the Soviet authorities say I must When the Germans began to close in on our city do you know how many of our workers joined the Volunteer Corps? They made up a whole division! Many have been killed but even now there are units in the army, where our Putilov lads are in the majority '

All this was told to me by Comrade Muzheinik, a veteran worker of the Putilov Works which played such an important part in the Russian revolutionary movement and now bears the name of Sergei Kirov a prominent leader of the Soviet state

The Volunteer Corps Muzheinik mentioned has indeed earned itself a glorious reputation for its part in the defence of Leningrad shielding the city at the decisive moment with the bodies of its soldiers The superbly equipped German army, which had spent years preparing for this war and had behind it two years combat experience in Western Europe and the Balkans was halted at the walls of Leningrad And not only halted–suffering tremendous losses in men and equipment it had to dig in and was pushed back on a number of sectors This is a historical fact which future generations will regard with awe and admiration

We sent our people to fight in the Volunteer Corps,' Muzheinik continued, but we couldn t help wondering what would happen if the enemy broke into the city and cut us off from the works What should we do then? And we decided not to surrender the works under any circumstances and to prepare for all-round defence So we

built fortifications around the works to be able to defend it ourselves if the worst comes to the worst And apart from the Volunteer Corps we organised self-defence units Come what may we Kirov people will never abandon the works Sometimes one wonders just how many of us Kirov folk there are Certainly there are far more of us than are on the books For all the people of Narva district are Putilov folk in one way or another, all have something to do with the works all belong to the same big family There are countless numbers of us Just take this one thing–so many people have joined the Volunteer Corps, and yet work goes on All equipment and all regular workers have been evacuated to the east and yet work goes on

'I don't suppose the workers liked the idea of leaving their native city for the rear? I asked 'As far as I am aware several thousand of them were evacuated by plane, and that means they could only take along a few bare necessities "

"Some liked it more, some less, Muzheinik answered with a smile 'But on the whole they did not make much ado about going You may wonder why Simply because Kirov workers know full well that neither Leningrad nor their works will ever submit to the enemy, and that the Kirov workers, if anybody, will certainly return to their native parts We re still evacuating people even now–children, the old and the sick When they object we say Don t you worry, you ll come back as soon as possible The works will remain where it is nothing will happen to it Muzheinik uttered these words with such profound conviction as could not but command respect And we also tell them 'You re going to your own people to Kirov folk We re all one And it makes us proud to hear that over there they work not merely just as well as here, but two or three times better We are proud of them and we envy them See that shop? Huge, isn t it But it is standing empty He sighed sadly 'Do you know what it is? It s the turbine shop I started off there in 1914 It s a grand shop! They ve been shelling it something terrible, but there it stands

I was one of a group of writers, most of us army correspondents, come to inspect the works It lay before us spread over an enormous territory, like a whole city This veteran of Russian industry presented at once a majestic and tragic sight Throughout the blockade it had been subjected to incessant bombing and shelling and was scarred and damaged all over But it held out, and was fighting back It stood in the second line of the front, as it were, but it was a second line of such importance that the enemy concentrated its fire on it

The works, within its ring of fortifications, was neat and tidy Some of the shops were empty, some were still working Every-

where painful traces of destruction met the eye—broken walls, collapsed roofs, empty window-frames and shell craters in the yard. But the chimneys smoked busily. Of course, as compared to peacetime, work was not exactly in full swing as was only to be expected, but it nevertheless remained an important arms factory employing several thousand workers. And the sounds of whirring lathes, the roaring of furnaces, the rumbling of rolling mills and the hoots of a small locomotive shunting in the yard was sweet music to our ears.

The iron foundry, one of the biggest workshops, showed many traces of heavy artillery hits, some old, some quite fresh, but work in this vast shop went on non-stop round the clock.

Once, when a fire broke out, Konstantin Skobnikov, the forty-three-year-old shop manager, fought the flames with a group of workers while work in the shop went on. With the agility of a young man he climbed onto the roof followed by other members of the self-styled fire-brigade. They worked like Trojans, without a thought for themselves and losing all track of time. When the fire was finally put out and it was clear that the workshop had been saved, Skobnikov was surprised to discover that his hands were bleeding and his face burnt.

'Well, damn it, I built this shop,' he told us with an amused smile on his lively, sun-burnt face. 'You might say the shop is a part of me. I built it twelve years ago and have been working here ever since. Spent practically all my mature years here.'

'Remember how we cleaned it up in the spring, Konstantin Mikhailovich?' asked the very ancient, white-haired foreman who accompanied us on our tour of the shop.

'There were mountains of rubbish,' Skobnikov responded chuckling. 'And everything covered with ice—pretty discouraging, I can tell you. I must admit when we started I had my doubts as to whether we'd really ever be able to do it. We carted out mountains of junk.'

'So there was a period when the shop was not working?' I asked.

'Yes, there was. There was a time when I lived here all by myself.'

'How do you mean, lived?'

'Oh, I live right here. My family has been evacuated. In winter I had an iron stove, and I got what heat I could from it. It was silent as the grave all around, the only sound was the wind whistling through the broken windows. Snow had swept in, and everything was covered with hoar-frost. There were moments when I doubted that the shop would ever revive again.'

'But what did you do all those long days and nights?'

In the day-time I was busy enough there is plenty of work to be done here in Leningrad Evenings I sat alone and thought or read books

What did you think about? What did you read?

There were plenty of things that needed thinking about Skobnikov replied seriously 'People revealed themselves to the full in those hard days Never before had I seen people attain such heights of spiritual nobility or fall to such depths of moral degradation For instance in December 1941 when our shop was still working despite the terrible cold and hunger we had a wonderful old man who made earthen moulds He was a past master at his job one of those old artists who don t know themselves how they do it He made wonderful moulds When people asked him what proportions he used in mixing ingredients he answered There is no one proportion I just feel it with my hand and know what I need to add and how much They say about such people that they know the secret but the only secret is their clever hands Well we had to substitute local sands for those they used to bring from special workings Everybody kept saying that nothing would come of it And sure enough nothing did–with everybody but this old man He could still make the moulds all right But then we noticed that he was growing weak He declined rapidly before our very eyes but he did not stop work Instead he started teaching his old woman how to make moulds He was all the time explaining things to her, showing her how or making her do something on her own Sometimes when she couldn't get the hang of it, he would get quite angry with her, then would show her again and again One day a young lad ran to fetch me He s calling for you he said and I knew at once who he meant I found him lying on a heap of that same mixture he made so well and his wife standing by with not a tear in her eyes Other old workers were gathered round Well Konstantin Mikhailovich, he said in a weak voice, I am dying My old woman will take my place After that he said no more to us but gave last minute instructions to his wife, lest she forget what to mix with what She repeated things after him and kept assuring him, Don t you worry I won t forget And she did not cry though it was a sight to make even a dispassionate onlooker weep But it s true what they say that all tears froze in Leningraders that winter He died in the middle of a sentence One saw things like that quite frequently And then there were those that stooped so low as to steal the last bit of bread from a comrade As to reading, I mostly read Balzac and Stendhal, and I learned a lot about human nature from them '

Konstantin Skobnikov, the son of an engine-driver, graduated from secondary school in 1917 and from a technological institute in 1925 He is an excellent engineer with a good theoretical grounding and great practical experience He told us what ingenuity was required of an engineer in the conditions of the blockade, when they lacked so many materials without which they had once believed production to be impossible He mentioned some of the problems he had come up against how to adapt furnaces so that they could work both on coal and firewood, depending on which fuel was available, how to produce cast-iron without coke, what to use for fixation in the absence of vegetable oils? These and many other economic problems large and small were solved by the quick wits of Leningrad engineers and supply men

I had occasion to watch many of the latter at work They are remarkable people The war has been teaching the supply men of the entire country strict economy, but from the point of view of Leningraders the achievements scored in this field elsewhere are the height of extravagance The Leningraders are the most economical, ingenious and thrifty managers ever known in our country

Thousands of shells have landed on the territory of the Kirov Works but it continues to manufacture all kinds of modern weapons and ammunitions, from mines and shells to tanks

Most of the work is done by women There is no trade however complicated or physically arduous, that the women of Leningrad have not mastered

In Skobnikov s workshop we watched Rumyantseva, the team-leader in the moulding section, at work She knew nothing about production when she came to the works, and she learnt her trade in as little as three weeks and is now the works celebrity As she talked to us, her small deft hands lived a life of their own, nimble and accurate There was a lightness in all her movements as though she danced beside her moulds

Don t you worry comrade officers, she replied playfully to some words of praise We ll do our bit alright It s up to you now to drive the Germans away from Leningrad–soon

As I said, many of us were in uniform Rumyantseva smiled playfully

We love you very much, but you are stationed much too near for our liking The further away you go, the better we shall love you

The women who worked nearby laughed and we men were somewhat put out to tell the truth

In another section of the shop we saw a group of women grinding mortar shell casings at huge grind-stones, with sparks fanning out

in all directions Behind each hot shells lay in a pile I stopped beside one woman A dark kerchief was pushed low over her forehead and I could not determine her age With gloved hands she would pick up a shell from the pile and then press it to the rotating grinding wheel straining with all her body to hold it in position Sparks flew all over her This was the initial crude grinding before the shells went for further treatment Without paying me the slightest attention, the woman took one shell after another and repeated the operation The task of holding the shell against the rotating wheel was so strenuous that her whole body shuddered

It was hard work, a man s work I wanted to see the face of the woman and so I stood there until she turned to me She was about forty, and her features were amazingly beautiful stern and finely chiselled

Is the work very hard? I asked her

Yes, at first it was very hard, she replied picking up another shell and pressing it to the wheel

Where is your husband? I asked, taking advantage of the short interval when she put down one shell and picked up another

He died this winter

I did not ask her what he had died of–that was clear enough

Have you any children?

Yes One girl at school another at the works kindergarten and a son in the army

Women of Leningrad! Will anybody ever find adequate words to express the grandeur of your toil your loyalty to your Country to your city, the army, work and family, your boundless courage? Everywhere we see your beautiful, skilful and tireless hands hard at work You are to be seen at the lathe at the bedside of a wounded soldier at the air-defence post on the roof in office, children s home and nursery school behind the wheel of a lorry mining peat chopping down timber for firewood unloading barges wearing the clothes of a workman militiaman air-defence volunteer, railwayman army surgeon and telegraph operator Your voice is heard over the radio, your hands cultivate vegetable patches on the outskirts of Leningrad and in all its gardens and boulevards You take care of buildings, bring up orphans, bear on your shoulders all the great burden of keeping family life going in a besieged city And your smiles, like the sun s rays, light up the whole life of Leningrad

And how many of you, splendid daughters of Leningrad, are out on the front line Olga Makkaveiskaya, a nurse attached to a company of sub-machine gunners shyly showed me her Komsomol card with a bullet hole in it She had been wounded in the chest

and small red spots were visible on the back side of the card, which had been pressed to her body Olga Makkaveiskaya had recovered and returned to her company Payments of dues were marked neatly in her blood-spattered Komsomol card "Now I have another one, she said with a happy, modest smile showing me a new Party card

The Kirov Works is the pride of Leningrad, just as it has always been It still publishes its own newspaper The editor-in-chief is Alexei Solovyov a worker-poet The newspaper is called For Labour Valour , but in Leningrad, more than anywhere else in the country, labour valour is identified with combat valour

The Kirov workers live and work on the front line Their flats are veritable shelters, and pretty unreliable shelters at that, and they go to work as into attack Half an hour before our arrival six welders had been killed by a shell explosion The workers have got used to danger, and they go on working, making jokes, attending to their daily affairs But on their faces, as on those of soldiers at the front, there is a shadow, some elusive furrow which comes from consciousness of constant danger It is a furrow that is at the same time stern and mischievous, sterner in the older people, rather more mischievous in the younger

In the tank engine assembly shop managed by engineer Starostenko, a man of great talent and boundless resourcefulness, we were introduced to the young foreman Yevstigneyev We had already heard about him

For more than three days and nights Yevstigneyev had stayed in the shop working on an urgent war order Underfed, like all the rest, his strength began to fail His comrades told him he needed some rest He bridled up at this, refusing point-blank to leave his work place I m still your foreman, he said sharply, and it s up to me to make the decisions Your job is to fulfil them '

But his hands would no longer obey him and finally he had to go home

In the evening some of his comrades came to see him

Here, look what they re writing about you,' said the youngest of them handing him a newspaper

Yevstigneyev waved it aside but after his friends had left he read that Yevstigneyev s team was the best at the works Then he put on his clothes and set out for work, reeling from weakness The shop manager yelled at him saying that he wouldn t allow him to work and that he would do much better to go home

But I m not going to work Comrade Starostenko,' Yevstigneyev replied pleadingly, I ll just look on

And he came and looked on every day for a week as a result of which his team fulfilled the month s quota four days ahead of time

The Kirov workers asked us to arrange a literary recital at the plant Leningrad poets Nikolai Tikhonov Alexander Prokofiev and myself took part It was held in the cellar of one of the factory buildings which had been fitted out for meetings and parties The hall which seated 700 was not big enough to accommodate all who wanted to be present The aisles were packed and the door had to be locked Still people kept hammering on it all through the evening, although an artillery attack on the plant was in progress

Nikolai Tikhonov read his poem Kirov Is with Us It told about the beloved leader of the Leningrad workers treacherously murdered on December 1, 1934 making the rounds of besieged Leningrad on a pitch-dark, freezing night

The impact of this poem, a splendid work in itself was doubled by the realisation that it had been written by Tikhonov that cruel winter in an icy flat by the light of a wick lamp and by the fact that he read it himself to Kirov workers in the cellar of a factory building while the Germans were shelling the plant The listeners sat immobile, as though turned into stone Their faces were at the same time grave and touchingly moved

One chapter of the poem describes Kirov passing by the plant bearing his name

Past bombed-out houses, crippled fences,
Beneath the shattered vault of sky,
Walks Kirov through the streets of tensely
Alert and armoured Leningrad
This man, a fighter just and wrathful
Walks slowly through the town he loves
The Kirov Works blacked-out and frozen
Looks like a fortress, dark and stern
There are no breaks, no smokes, no chatting
All thought of rest and sleep is gone
The workers faces, strained and sweating
Are grimly purposeful and strong
The workshops have been hit in air-raids
And fires have broken out in here
The work goes on do what you ve got to
Don t give in to fatigue or fear
If for a moment courage fails them
An old man speaks up from their midst

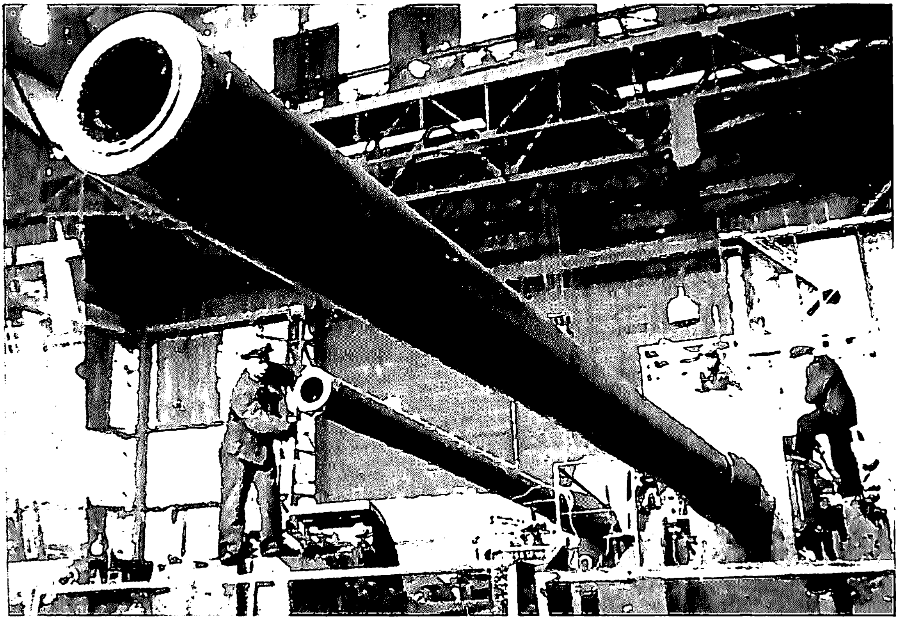


Leningrad 1942



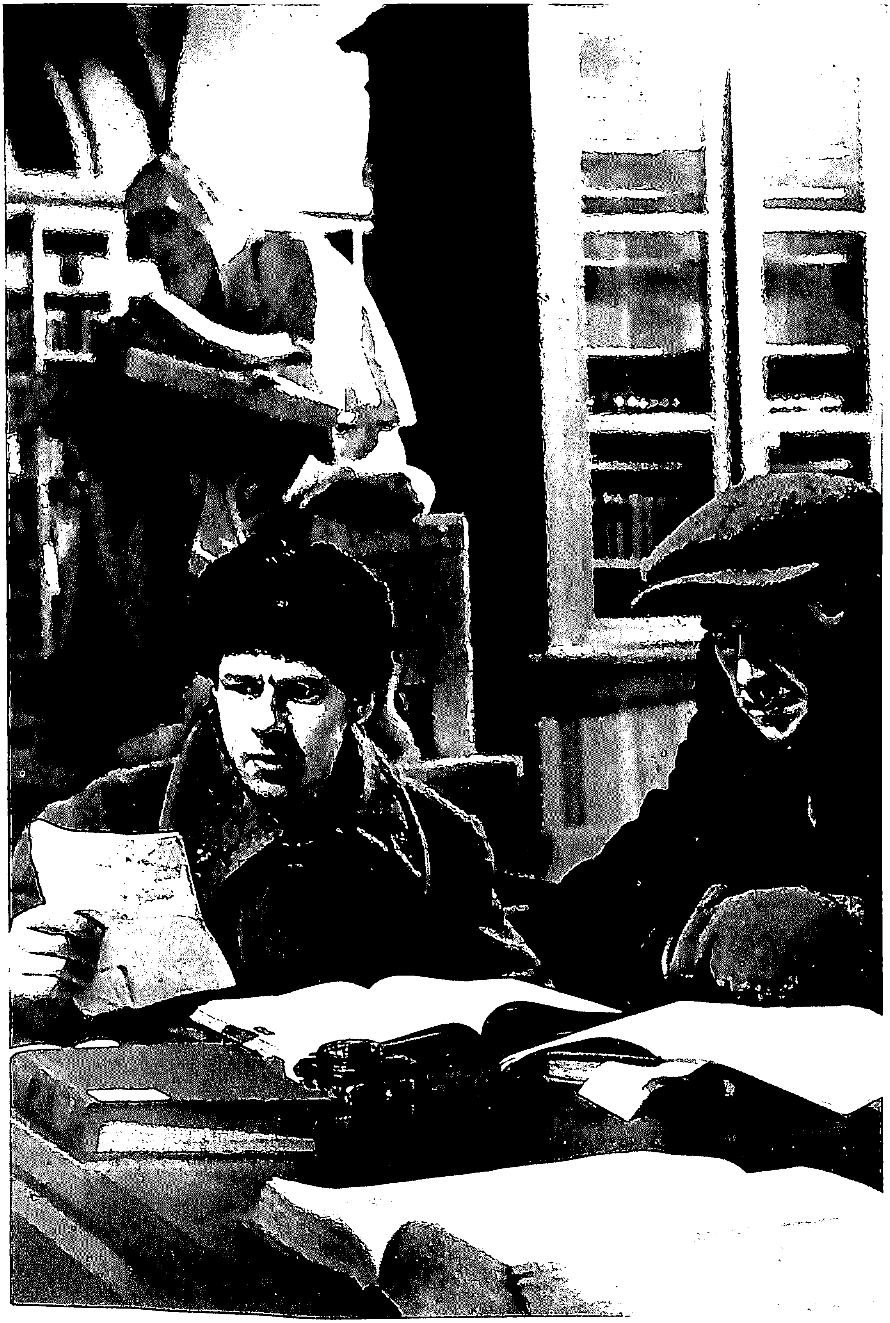
The agony of Leningrad. During the 900 days of siege the inhabitants of the front-line city displayed unparalleled courage and endurance







Leningrad war factories worked round the clock



Despite intolerable conditions, life —and endeavour—go on. In a Leningrad library, 1942

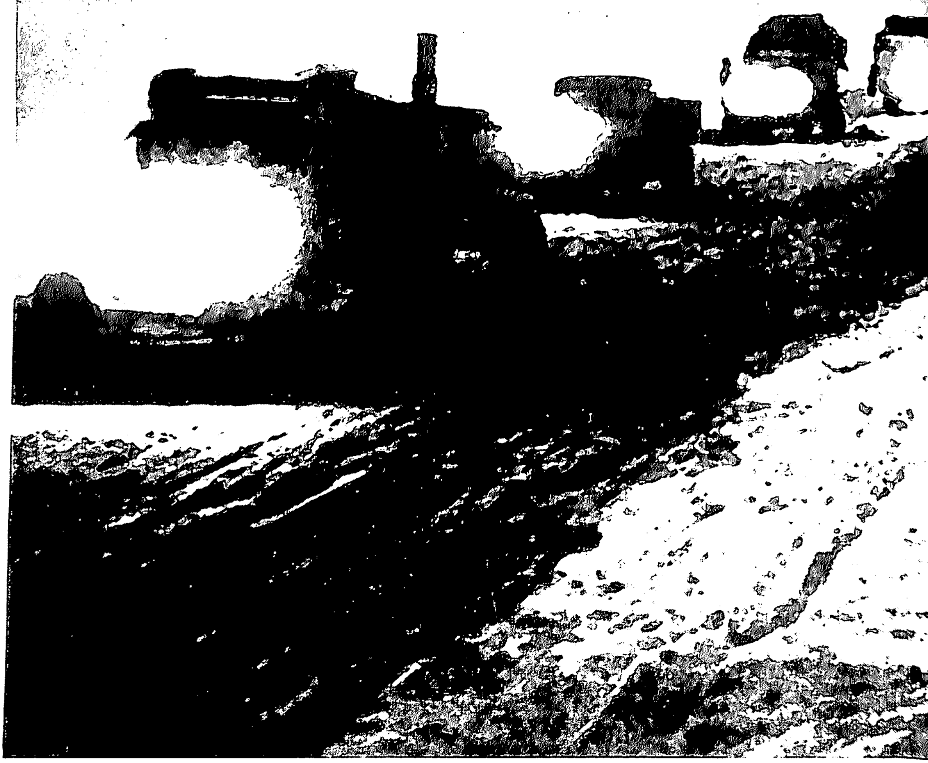


Poet Nikolai Tikhonov photographed
during the blockade





Day after day, month after month. . . .



The Ladoga lifeline





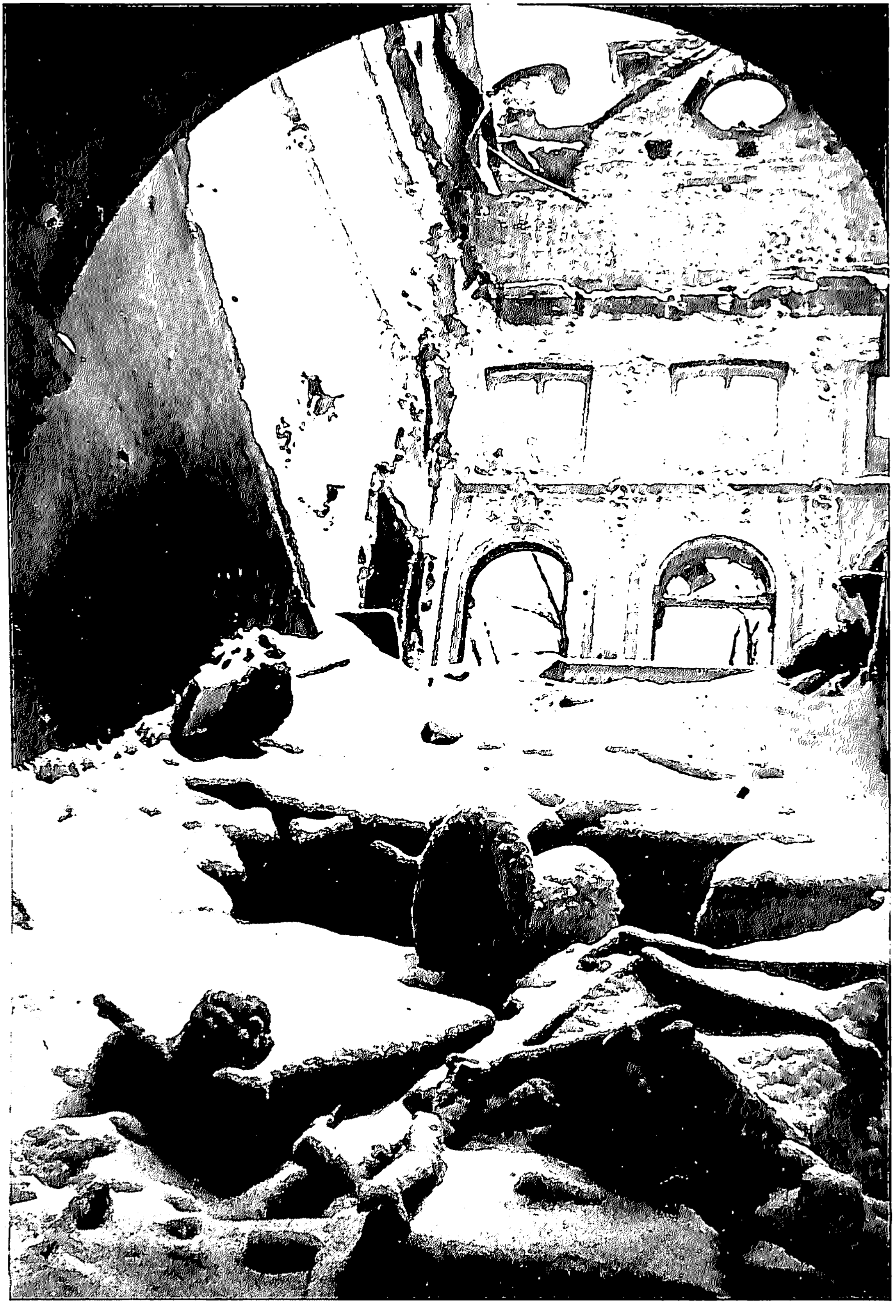
Composer Dmitry Shostakovich working on his Seventh (Leningrad) Symphony in the besieged city



A soldier buys a ticket to hear Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony

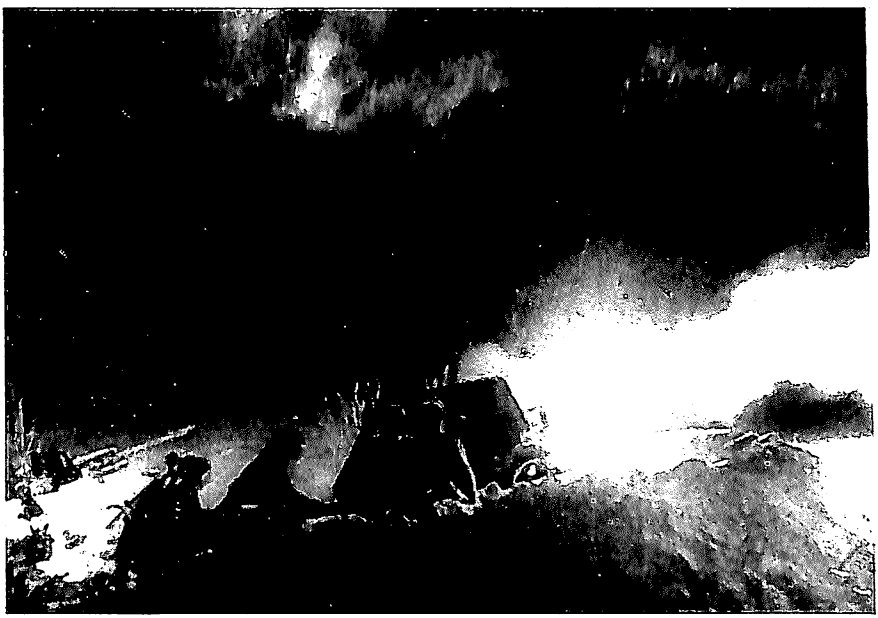


... life triumphs over death and destruction.... Leningrad babies born in July 1942

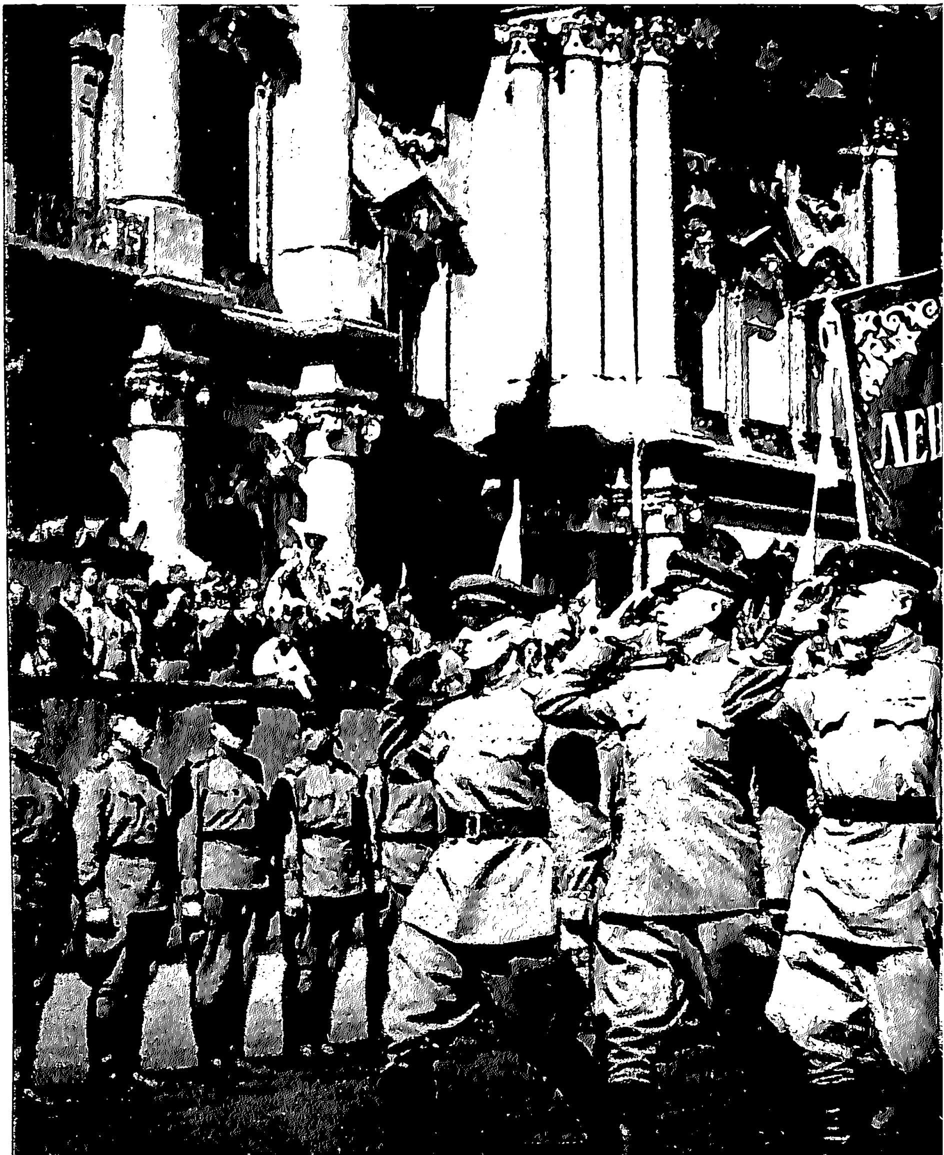


Nazi vandalism in Leningrad's countryside. The main entrance hall of the Palace of Catherine the Great at Pushkin





Leningrad, here we come!



Troops of the Leningrad Front march past the Winter Palace during victory parade, June 1945


НГРАДСКИЙ
ФРОНТ

He s worked here all his life, this old man,
And what he says to them is this
Our soup is thin alright, and bread
Is worth its weight in gold, I grant it
But we ve got strength and guts instead,
We ll let ourselves feel tired after
Their bombing didn t get them far,
So now they d starve us out, the braves!
From Russia slice off Leningrad,
And make us Leningraders slaves!
Like hell they will, not on their life!
Why, on the Neva's holy banks
The Russian working men will die,
But not surrender, never that
We ll deck the front out in new armour,
And smash the blockade just the same
It s not for nothing that this plant here
Bears Comrade Sergei Kirov s name!

As Tikhonov read these lines, tears rolled down the cheeks of the hardened Kirov workers, both men and women Tikhonov himself was visibly moved There was round after round of applause when he finished

Surrounded by young people, we walked across the factory yard to the main gates where a car was waiting for us It was the middle of May, just before the start of the white nights Although it was about nine p m the sun was just setting The mammoth works buildings, scarred and damaged as they were, looked very imposing in the red sunset glow We walked over shell splinters which were strewn all over the yard, and the young people showered us with questions about the life and work of their favourite writers and poets There was much joking and laughter The hum of work, sounding solemn at this evening hour, came from the shops

In front of the factory gates stands a huge statue of Kirov, portrayed as he often appeared on the rostrum wearing a leather cap, he stood on his sturdy legs, his arm thrown out in a wide oratorial gesture, a brave, confident smile on his broad Russian face The tails of his open coat were riddled by splinters, of which there were traces to be seen all over his powerful torso But he stood there, his outstretched arm calling to struggle, with the confident and charming smile of a strong and simple man He could not be killed now, any more than he had been killed on December 1, 1934, for both Kirov and the cause for which he fought are immortal

Olga Bergholtz

Olga Bergholtz is well known to Soviet and foreign readers for her many volumes of poetry screen-plays stage plays and prose writing Born and bred in Leningrad she was there throughout the grim days of the blockade from 1941 to 1944 Soldiers learnt her poems and verses by heart Her Radio Leningrad broadcasts moved the hearts of millions In the recollections included in this volume Olga Bergholtz speaks of the fortitude and patriotism of the Soviet intelligentsia during the war years

'THIS IS RADIO LENINGRAD'

On one very cold January night in 1942, some three days after the radio had become silent in nearly all districts of Leningrad, an idea was conceived at the Radio Committee in the hostel of the literary department of writing a book entitled This Is Radio Leningrad!

The Art Director of the Radio Committee Babushkin, Makogonenko editor of the Literary Department and myself drew up a detailed plan, toiling over it practically all through the night by the light of our only dim electric bulb with a newspaper for a shade

While outside in the thick, icy darkness racking explosions roared, in the big long room members of the department staff lay sleeping on camp-beds armchairs and sofas ranged along the walls, making the room rather like a railway carriage Wearing their coats, felt boots and gloves they were sunk in heavy, oppressive slumber moaning and muttering either dried up or bloated from hunger One of them the journalist Pravdich no longer moaned or muttered It crossed my mind that he was probably dead In the morning we discovered that he was

Both for me and my companions that night of January 10 1942 was one of the happiest and most sublime nights in our lives once we had started planning our book we suddenly found ourselves for the first time since the war had begun, looking back over the path trodden by our city its people and its art (including our Radio Committee) and full of wonder to find it so appalling and so glorious we were overwhelmed by a thrilling realisation, which was almost physical that, however horrible the reality, the wonderful, natural, wise mode of human existence referred to as peace was

bound to return, and we felt that both victory and peace would come very shortly–why, it was only a matter of days!

And therefore the three of us, hungry and weak as we were were proud and happy, and felt a magic influx of strength

All the same, we *are* going to live to see it, don t you think? Yasha Babushkin exclaimed happily I so want to live to see how it ll all be, don t you?

He laughed shyly, cast us a quick glance and there was such avid, impatient pleading in his large shining eyes that we hastened to agree

Of course, we ll live to see it, Yasha We *all* shall!

We could see perfectly well that he was in a very bad way, almost at death s door He was bloated all over, his skin had a greenish tinge and it cost him a tremendous effort to climb the stairs Yet he slept little and worked hard and we understood that it could not be otherwise (for he shouldered such a weight of responsibilities the orchestra alone was a full-time job), that he could not and would not spare himself We were powerless to help him in any way, and so we hastened to assure him that we would definitely live to see victory, *all* of us

He smiled happily, and said nothing, as if pondering over our answer, and then lowered his eyelids slowly They were inflamed, dark and heavy As always, when Babushkin closed his eyes, his youthful face immediately grew older, he looked exhausted and terribly ill We exchanged glances and were silent too Suddenly, without opening his eyes he said slowly and softly

Here he is,
the chemist,
silent, lofty-browed
Wrinkling his forehead,
new experiments contriving
Through the World Who s Who
he leafs
and thinks
aloud
Twentieth century
Let s look who s worth reviving?

He paused and then went on, his voice gradually rising louder

Here s Mayakovsky–
not among the brightest
No,
the poet isn t nice enough to see '

From Today
I'll holler to the scientist
Leave off turning pages!
Revive me!

We shall include broadcasts of his poems in our book Babushkin said enthusiastically, opening his eyes and immediately growing young again They acquire a special meaning in our conditions Why Leningrad speaks with his voice too!

The book we planned that night was to include poems short stories articles, satirical prose, documents, whole programmes broadcast by Radio Leningrad and, most important of all, the voices of Leningraders–soldiers and sailors workers and scientists, actors and writers

We intended to arrange it all in chronological order, beginning with the first days of the war and ending with the breach of the blockade which on that sublime night, seemed quite imminent The breach of the blockade was somehow identified in our minds with total victory Yet a whole year was to pass before the blockade was broken over two until the city was completely relieved, and more than three till final victory But although firmly believing that victory was nigh and with no idea of the truly inconceivable calamities that were in store for us we were neither blind nor naive, nor flippant I repeat, that night, as we looked back on the short and tragic but inherently victorious and valiant path trodden by our city we felt with every fibre of our beings the invincibility of our people and, consequently, of our city, Leningrad Rare precious moments like that night should be treasured and revered

Nowhere had radio broadcasts played such a big role as in our besieged city

In August of 1941 when the last roads leading from Leningrad had been cut and the noose of the blockade tightened on the city's throat the radio remained practically the only means of communication with the rest of the country

From the radio the Leningraders learned about what happened at the fronts (newspapers from the 'mainland reached us with great difficulty) it was only over the radio that Russia learned about what was happening in Leningrad And it had to know the truth about it for the Germans who were making frantic efforts to capture the city, declared every day for all the world to know, that Leningrad's fall was a matter of hours Actually, German newspapers in occupied parts of the Leningrad region announced the capture of the city and carried faked photographs of an SS man

standing on guard outside a building on Nevsky Prospekt The German command set the date for a ceremonious parade in Palace Square and an officers banquet at the Astoria Hotel and even printed invitations for the banquet

On the instructions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Leningrad began its radio broadcasts–at a different time every day in order to confuse the Germans who did their best to jam our broadcasts Leningrad put on the air its defenders soldiers and sailors workers and party officials poets composers and scientists

Our broadcasts were relayed from Moscow to all parts of the country so that our whole people knew Leningrad was still holding out Leningrad had not surrendered This was during the most desperate period of the war when the German armies were crashing forwards and we were forced to abandon one town after another And there was Leningrad bringing the Germans to a halt! Leningrad held out, live voices of Leningraders vowed that it would not surrender either today or tomorrow or ever and the next day the city spoke again Leningrad stood its ground and fought back full of strength wrath and resolution

These broadcasts continued despite bombing raids and shellings They always began with the same words This is Radio Leningrad the city of Lenin calling the Country!

The composer Dmitry Shostakovich spoke in this programme on the day when *Leningradskaya Pravda* carried a huge headline The Enemy Is at Our Gates Our city is facing an immediate danger of invasion by a base and ruthless enemy the editorial ran Leningrad has become the front line The appeals of the Military Council pasted on the walls bore the same message The Enemy Is at Our Gates! While the composer was driving to the Radio Committee an air-raid warning sounded But the country which was avidly listening to Leningrad s voice did not know that Shostakovich was speaking to the coughing of AA guns and the roar of explosions

Luckily no bombs dropped near the Committee The composer spoke with great emotion and his voice though somewhat hollow was clear and outwardly calm

An hour ago I completed the second part of my new work Shostakovich began If I manage to complete the third and fourth parts of this composition and if it turns out well I shall be able to call it the Seventh Symphony Despite the war-time conditions despite the danger which is threatening Leningrad I have written the first two parts in a comparatively short time Why am I telling you this? I am telling you so that listeners tuned in to me

now should know that life in our city is normal All of us are soldiers today and those who work in the field of culture and the arts are doing their duty on a par with all the other citizens of Leningrad

Twenty-two years have passed since I first held in my hands these two pages torn from a note-book and covered with nervous minute handwriting almost without corrections Today as then they pierce my heart with their ineffable civic dignity and chaste modesty The editor gave me these pages and asked my opinion did I not think that the speech sounded too calm ?

No I said We must make no changes here and mustn t add a single elevated sentence Only please, can I keep this rough copy?

' By all means, he said laughing, only let me copy some of the things I jotted down on the back It s a plan of current broadcasts for the city

And I still hold on to this rough copy of Shostakovich s speech On the back in a different but also hurried handwriting is the following plan of current broadcasts for the city

1 Organisation of detachments
2 Street communications
3 The building of barricades
4 Fighting with incendiary bottles
5 Defence of a house
6 Stress that fighting is now going on the near approaches

These instructions were to be broadcast within the next day or two Meanwhile Shostakovich was speaking on in his subdued voice

Soviet musicians my dear numerous comrades-in-arms, my friends! Remember that grave danger faces our art Let us defend our music let us work honestly and selflessly

And they certainly did work for the defence, the musicians of the only orchestra which remained in Leningrad, the orchestra of the Radio Committee True in those days, not a single song or melody sounded over the radio–somebody had decided that this was no time for music But the orchestra was alive, it broadcast concerts for England and Sweden for it was important that they, too should know that we were not only fighting and resisting the enemy, but even performing Chaikovsky and Beethoven Besides nearly all members of the orchestra did air defence duty and helped to build fortifications The violinist A Presser was head of the Radio Committee s fire-watching team the very first incendiary bomb which fell on our roof was put out by our first viola I Yasi-

nyavsky, Y Shakh and A Safonov helped to dig trenches round the city on the very day when Shostakovich spoke over the radio Little did they imagine then that one day they would play that same symphony the composer was speaking about

Goodbye, comrades, he said in conclusion I shall soon be completing my Seventh Symphony My mind is clear and the drive to create urges me on to conclude my composition And then I shall come on the air again, with my new work and shall nervously await your stern friendly judgment I assure you in the name of all Leningraders, in the name of all those working in the field of culture and the arts, that we are invincible and that we are ever at our posts

I assure you that we are invincible Thus spoke Shostakovich, one of the famous sons of Leningrad its pride and he spoke for all Leningraders And the whole country listening to Leningrad s every word with pride, pain and anxiety believed him

Late that autumn, when the first partisans of Leningrad region crossed the front line into the city and visited the Radio Committee in order to speak to the citizens–under an assumed name or just one letter–we learned just how much broadcasts from Leningrad meant to them

Day after day the Germans wrote in their newspapers that Leningrad had been captured and the Baltic Fleet destroyed the commander of the Luga detachment N A Panov (then Comrade P) told us "The people were depressed by the news and morale in our detachment was low too What were we to do? We held a party meeting, with only one question on the agenda has Leningrad been surrendered or not We passed the decision that it hadn't Yes we wrote it down in these very words to consider Leningrad not surrendered But we had a gnawing feeling in our heart of hearts Then one day we met some partisans from Oredezha Our first question was, of course How are things in Leningrad?' They had a radio receiver Let s try and tune in they said And can you imagine such luck, within the hour we heard This is Radio Leningrad The cruiser *Kirov* calling You can t imagine what it meant for us! So Leningrad was alive and kicking and so was the Baltic Fleet! Our party meeting had adopted the right decision after all Immediately we despatched our men into the villages to let the people know that Leningrad had not surrendered and was not going to surrender It helped us no end

The voice of Leningrad reached the furthermost corners of our country In 1944, housewives in Sevastopol and the curator of the Kherson museum Alexander Takhtai told us about the impact of

the Leningrad broadcasts In the autumn of 1941 the besieged cities of Sevastopol Kiev and Odessa started exchanges of broadcasts with blockaded Leningrad It was a bitter and heroic time and sadly the exchanges did not continue for very long The longest of all was the series of exchanges with Sevastopol which lasted right up until the Germans captured the city

We tuned in to Leningrad with a particular kind of trepidation Takhtai told us, for it was the voice of a comrade-in-arms the voice of our elder brother The calm and determination of the Leningraders voices amazed and inspired us We knew from our own experience what lay behind those simple words despite fierce enemy attacks both on land and in the air But we were to be still more impressed later, when we learned what you lived through in the winter and spring of 1942 besides those fierce attacks'

No we never concealed anything or tried to deceive anybody we simply spoke about the main truth which mattered most for everybody–we were holding out and would continue to hold out

In broadcasts to the city we were more outspoken

I remember how on September 19 1941, the day of a particularly savage air-raid that will be remembered by all Leningraders a woman who lived in Stremyannaya Street came to the studio Her name was Moskovskaya and she had just lost two children under the ruins of their house She had never spoken over the radio before, but she came to us and said 'Let me speak over the radio Please, I want to speak!'

She told the listeners what had happened to her children an hour before What I remember most is not so much her words as her breathing The heavy laboured breathing of a person who is all the time keeping down a scream, suppressing a fit of violent sobbing This breathing amplified by the loudspeakers came into the houses of Leningrad and into the trenches on the approaches to the city and soldiers listened to a mother s story of how her little boy and girl had died in Stremyannaya Street, listened to her breathing the breathing of boundless grief and boundless courage They all remembered this breathing and it helped them to hold out

Speaking from the rostrum provided by the radio the people of the city where personal and public had merged into one, supported and encouraged one another and rallied closer together

As a writer I am proud to be able to say that the voices of Leningrad writers sounded loud and clear in those days Art had mounted this huge unprecedented rostrum not only to make speeches agitate and appeal no, it also conducted heart-to-heart talks with fellow citizens it pondered aloud on the most vital issues, it coun-

selled and comforted and shared in the joys and sorrows of all who listened reaching their hearts by the route that is open to art alone

As regards speeches and appeals we had our aces too No Leningrader who lived through the blockade will ever forget the passionate addresses of Vsevolod Vishnevsky The radio whose instruments are sound voice and timbre was an ideal medium for communicating to listeners the inimitable tone of this author who was a Baltic sailor serving on the cruiser *Aurora* when it fired its historic shot during the storming of the Winter Palace His tone and manner were in themselves a live bond with the revolutionary history of Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad This devil-may-care manner of the Baltic sailor this familiar fo c sle note that had been vindicated so splendidly during the October Revolution and the Civil War now made a come-back so alive, so authentic, so dear to everybody s heart True the Baltic sailor had grown older and sterner but in that terrible autumn of 1941 in those desperate days of the assault his passionate at times rather disjointed speeches were so encouraging and so necessary for this city which not only cherished its traditions but lived by them

Every appeal of old Petersburg workers to their fellow-citizens to the volunteers and the soldiers ended with the oath We shall die rather than surrender our beloved Leningrad!

The oath repeated almost word for word the slogans written on the banners of soldiers and Red Guards who went out in 1917-1919 to defend the city against Kornilov Kerensky or Yudenich We shall Die Rather than Surrender Red Peter (Petrograd)!

Nor was it a quotation either, it was a live *cri du coeur* as alive and urgent as were the speeches of Vsevolod Vishnevsky with his inimitable manner of a revolutionary sailor of the Baltic Fleet

On several occasions I had the good luck to hear him speak to army units at factories or over the radio It was a sheer delight to listen to him delight and hard work Yes work because at such moments your heart and brain began to work strenuously and you found yourself automatically clenching your fists Take for example his radio speech on the occasion of the twenty-fourth anniversary of the October Revolution

The night before the October anniversary the evening dusk has fallen over the city on the frozen Neva which is ready for anything The front-city is alive and the heartbeats of the revolution are as strong in it as ever It is calm and confident like a true Russian, like Lenin The loudspeakers are broadcasting Lev Tolstoi's story Sevastopol Winter 1854 The crowd listens spellbound They recognise themselves Tolstoi s Fourth Bastion is

Leningrad today Everything in Tolstoi s account is accurate everything is as it is now The matter-of-fact Russian heroism, modest and pure A blacked-out tram goes out to the front-line, to the Fourth Bastion This great city is faithful to October it is fully aware of its destiny and of itself It knows what awaits it–work sacrifices loyalty courage and victory

Or take his famous speech Listen beloved Moscow! made in the hardest days of the war when the enemy was on the approaches to the capital when we Leningraders used to say 'Moscow s defence line passes through the heart of every Leningrader

Moscow! We Leningraders and Baltic sailors are with you shoulder to shoulder with you, our beloved capital! You have fought many battles, Moscow and the whole world listens to your voice your labours and holidays are a revelation and the morrow of mankind Moscow throw into battle everything that is alive militant and honest Do it without delay Allow no hesitation no fear, no failures The dying Baltic sailors can show you an example Even on the brink of death these men were able to see indeed did see victory our future victory It will come! It is beyond the winter blizzards ahead yonder!

No this speech cannot be quoted in parts How fortunate that it has been preserved almost in full in a recording

I recollect another talk in the series This Is Radio Leningrad!' at the end of September 1941, when the city was subjected to the most ferocious artillery bombardments and air-raids This talk was made by the poetess Anna Akhmatova We recorded it not in the studio but at the Writers House, a building which was jokingly called the sky-scriber in the flat of Mikhail Zoshchenko As luck would have it there was a terrific artillery bombardment going on we were all terribly nervous and the recording was going badly To Anna Akhmatova s dictation I wrote down her short speech which she subsequently corrected and this yellowed sheet of paper is as precious to me as is the draft of Shostakovich s speech And just as clearly as I remember today after the lapse of twenty years the subdued wise calm voice of Shostakovich and the effervescent voice of Vishnevsky now high now low and intense so I preserve in my memory the deep tragic and proud voice of the Muse of Sobbing as it floated over evening Leningrad, dark gold and hushed for a short while But in those days she wrote and spoke not at all as a Muse of Sobbing but as a true and valiant daughter of Russia and Leningrad

My dear fellow-citizens she said Mothers, wives and sisters of Leningrad For more than a month now the enemy has been

threatening our city with capture and inflicting severe wounds on it The city of Peter the Great the city of Lenin, the city of Pushkin Dostoyevsky and Blok, the city of a great culture and labour is threatened with disgrace and destruction Like all Leningraders I go numb with horror at the very thought that our city, my city may be trampled under My whole life has been bound up with Leningrad I became a poet in Leningrad Leningrad is the very air my verse breathes Like all of you, I only live by my unshakable faith that Leningrad will never bow down to the nazis This faith is made stronger when I see the women of Leningrad defending the city with such simple valour and enabling ordinary human existence to continue Our descendants will pay tribute to every mother of the time of the Patriotic War but particularly so to the woman of Leningrad who stands on the roof during an air-raid watching for the incendiaries, to a Leningrad volunteer-nurse helping the wounded among the ruins of a burning house No a city which has raised such women cannot be vanquished We Leningraders are living through very hard times but we know that our country and all our fellow-countrymen are with us We can feel their anxiety for us their love and their help We are grateful to them and we promise that we shall remain staunch and brave

I forgot to mention that the broadcasts for the country at large were listened to by Leningraders as well and that was why Anna Akhmatova was addressing the women of Leningrad But, first and foremost, these were broadcasts for the country at large and the whole world, and it was very important that alongside with rank-and-file defenders of the city, people whose names were known all over the globe should appear on the air The nazis listened to our broadcasts, too, of course They listened to them and as we found out later, wrote down the names of the speakers longing for a day of reckoning As we all know these paranoic ambitions were not to be realised It makes me proud to think that not one Leningrad author ever refused to take part in those broadcasts—on the contrary, it was regarded as a great honour to be invited Nikolai Tikhonov Alexander Prokofiev and Vissarion Sayanov made many appearances on Radio Leningrad with their courageous verse poems and sketches Alexander Fadeyev who came to Leningrad by plane in the spring of 1942 spoke over the radio twice I still have the text of the warm address by Mikhail Sholokhov

'Dear Comrade Leningraders!

We know how hard it is for you to live work and fight in a city encircled by the enemy At all the fighting fronts and in the rear we are always thinking of you The steel-founder in the far-

away Urals thinks of you as he watches the stream of molten metal, and he works furiously in order to hasten the hour of your liberation The soldier fighting the German invaders in the Donbas avenges not only his raped Ukraine, but also the cruel sufferings inflicted on you, Leningraders, by our enemies

We long for the hour when the ring of the blockade will be broken and the great Soviet land will press to its breast the heroic sons and daughters of eternally glorious Leningrad who have gone through so much suffering and privation

Almost all Leningrad writers spoke over the radio One of our best contributors was Vladimir Volzhenin, who worked with real inspiration and supplied us with material which was in the greatest demand–satirical verse, couplets and fables deriding the hitlerites and short sketches This went into our special daily programme which was called Radio News It always contained reports from the Leningrad Front and about the life of the city, a poem and, strange as it may appear to one today, a lot of humorous and satirical stuff Oh yes, we could still laugh at that terrible time Nor was it sick humour It was rather in the style of Mayakovsky s Terrible Laughter We ridiculed panic-mongers, windbags, loafers, all those rare but disgusting foreign bodies which occasionally appeared in the stern and clean Leningrad organism And, of course, we vented on the nazis whole Niagaras of sarcasm, irony, mockery and derision everything they deserved, not to mention, of course, our sacred and burning hatred, repugnance and contempt

Other excellent regular contributors to Radio News were Zoshchenko, Eugene Schwarz and I Metter Radio News was very popular both with civilians and soldiers and we often received delegations from army units who wanted to obtain material from a broadcast for use by propaganda teams In December when the Political Administration of the Baltic Fleet commissioned me to compile a small collection 'The Baltic Fleet Laughs I used some of the material from our Radio News, in particular Eugene Schwarz s charming Tales about the Devil And this was in December 1941, in a starving city deprived of light and warmth

Now we intended to take all this–Shostakovich s speech of September 1941, the voice of the mother who had lost her children in the ruins the passionate addresses by Vishnevsky the stern war poems of Tikhonov, the audacious couplets of Volzhenin and even some whole programmes for the country and from Radio News, as well as the partisans stories about the encouragement they gained

from the voice of Leningrad–and include it in the first part of the book This Is Radio Leningrad!

We also included in our plan for the book our winter broadcasts (This Is Radio Leningrad and Radio News survived even in those incredibly hard days)–a report from an arms works where starving Komsomols repaired tanks and wrote on them Death to Hitler! and Victory speeches poems and talks by Leningrad writers, Theatre by the Microphone programmes letters from listeners and descriptions of the fantastic mode of life of the Radio Committee staff (the celebrations of the fiftieth and hundredth programmes of Radio News were unforgettable)

Here I would like to add a small but very important explanation When we drew up our plan on that feverishly inspired night of 10th January 1942 there was much we did not know and were unable to foresee For instance we included a talk by Shostakovich about the symphony he was composing but little did we imagine that the symphony would be performed in Moscow in March that same year and that the composer and all the world were to name it the Leningrad Symphony, or that later in that same year it was to be performed in our besieged city by our own orchestra the orchestra of the Radio Committee! That winter the orchestra practically ceased to give performances, for its members did not have the strength This was particularly so in the case of the wind instruments, for the performers had nothing to strain their diaphragms against The orchestra kept dwindling Some went away to the front, others died of starvation I shall always remember those grey winter mornings when Yasha Babushkin now completely dropsical and leaden in colour, dictated to the typist his current reports on the state of the orchestra

The first violin is dying the drum died on his way to work, the French horn is at death s door, he dictated in an outwardly dispassionate voice hollow with despair

Yet the members who were alive–mostly those quartered on the premises of the Radio Committee–did not abandon their jobs, and went on doing their air-defence duty Karl Eliasberg heroically conducted rehearsals in the icy cold studio premises choosing works that would be within the musicians physical capacity When news came that the Seventh Symphony had been performed in Moscow and some time later its score was brought in by plane the orchestra became inflamed with the practically unattainable desire to perform the symphony here where it was born in the besieged, starving but defiant city From his first glance at the score Eliasberg realised that the dream was totally impracticable–

the monumental, forceful score required a doubled orchestra, nearly a hundred people, while the Radio Committee orchestra had dwindled by spring to fifteen musicians Nevertheless, he decided together with the then acting chairman of the Radio Committee Victor Khodorenko and the art director of the Committee Babushkin to perform the Seventh Symphony in Leningrad

The city Party Committee came to their aid, allocating the musicians an extra daily ration of porridge–by that time it amounted I believe to all of forty grams of cereals or beans An appeal was broadcast for all musicians in the city to report for duty to the Radio orchestra The response was quite impressive Among those who came was the first violin of the Philharmonic Society Zavetnovsky, emaciated, but trim and collected as ever, and Leningrad s oldest musician seventy-year-old Nagornyuk, who had played the French horn in orchestras conducted by Rimsky-Korsakov, Napravnik and Glazunov Nagornyuk s son, a soldier demobilised after a severe wound had been evacuated from Leningrad and had pleaded with his father to go with him But the old musician had refused he just had to play the Seventh Symphony!

There were still not enough and the Political Administrations of the Front and the Baltic Fleet issued an order that the best musicians from army and navy orchestras should be transferred to a combined city orchestra Thus the defenders of Leningrad grappled with *their own* symphony

And then the day came, August 9, 1942, when the white-columned hall of the Philharmonic Society, after months of desolation, was bright with festive lights and thronged with Leningraders They came from the front line and from wherever it was possible to walk or come by tram (trams had started running again in the spring) The audience was composed of workers who forged the weapons of defence, architects already planning the resurrection of the city teachers who gave dictations to children in air-raid shelters, writers and poets who had not laid down their pens in the appalling months of the past winter soldiers, officers, party functionaries and representatives of the city administration

The musicians of the combined orchestra came out onto the huge platform of the Philharmonic Society packing it to capacity We could see its nucleus the musicians of the Radio Orchestra–I Yasinyavsky, who put out the first incendiary on the studio roof the commander of the fire-watching squad violinist A Presser, A Safonov and Y Shakh who had helped to dig trenches near Pulkovo We could see musicians in army tunics and pea jackets, we could see before us defenders of Leningrad prepared as ever at any

moment, to give their lives for their native city their country and their people

Karl Eliasberg mounted the conductor s rostrum He was wearing a tail-coat, a real tail-coat, as befits a conductor, though it hung down from his emaciated frame as from a coat hanger There were a few moments of complete silence and then the Symphony began From its very first bars we recognised ourselves and the path we had trodden the epic of Leningrad which had already become legendary the ruthless enemy bearing down on us, our defiant resistance, our grief, our dream of a bright world, our undoubted forthcoming victory And we who had not cried over the dead bodies of our dear ones in winter were now unable to hold back soundless, bitter and relieving tears and were not ashamed of them Those of us who worked on the radio heard through that wonderful music the subdued, calm and wise voice of its creator Dmitry Shostakovich, coming from besieged Leningrad in September 1941, when the enemy was making frantic efforts to seize the city

I assure you, comrades, in the name of all Leningraders, that we are invincible and that we are ever at our posts

On that memorable night of January 10 we put down in our plan the breach of the blockade , although we had no idea how it would come It seemed to us, I repeat once again, that it would happen very soon we were not to know that the whole unbearably difficult year of 1942 was to pass before the blockade was broken

All that was happening at the Radio Committee the night the blockade was broken was spontaneous, unprepared and unplanned–the music, the poems written there and then, the speeches–it was a solid, unbroken current of rejoicing, heard by the Volkhov Front, the whole country, the entire world And the greatest reward for us at the studio was that on that happy festive night Leningraders came flocking to us, to their beloved, truly popular rostrum

One old woman walked all night from the other side of the city and when accosted by militiamen, answered I m going to the radio, sonny, to congratulate the Leningraders "

And the militiamen let her through though she had no night pass She reached us in the morning and did her congratulation bit

Another woman, a housewife, told us

When I heard in the news that the blockade had been broken, I burst into tears and ran back and forth around the flat, looking for somebody to hug, but I was all alone Then I thought I must run over here to the radio, but I was afraid to leave the flat So I just stood by the loudspeaker all night long, listening, and I did not feel alone

And although the blockade lasted another year after the breach had been made, with more exhausting shellings, bombings and new trials for the people, although the happy day of the final relief of the city only came a year later, the Leningraders remember the night of the 18th of January, 1943, as the summit of joy, a night when all hearts opened to one another And an indispensable part of that night was the voice of the radio which, for the first time in many long months, sang and spoke night through to the dawn for all the world to hear Leningrad s jubilation

The book This Is Radio Leningrad! never materialised Instead, a radio recording entitled ' Nine Hundred Days was made in 1945 for the anniversary of the German defeat at Leningrad Although it was only sound without pictures, here sound often attains an almost visual force Nine Hundred Days' was made up of documentary recordings, beginning with the first days of the war and ending with the German defeat at Leningrad You hear in it live voices of Leningraders, the whistling of shells and the roar of explosions, the weeping of a mother over her wounded child at 26, Rubinstein Street and the hooting of the first train to arrive from the Mainland in February 1943, a speech by Vishnevsky and a lot of other things belonging to the tragic and glorious past

This film was made by workers of the Radio Committee who were in Leningrad throughout the blockade the chief engineer N Sviridov, war correspondents L Magrachov and G Makogonenko, recording technician Lyubov Spektor, sound director N Rogov If Babushkin had been alive, he would have certainly taken part in the making of this film But Yasha Babushkin was dead We had been afraid that he would not be able to stand the rigours of the blockade and would starve to death, but he held out, and the blockade was unable to break him He fell in battle near Narva, in February 1944, in the fighting for the final relief of Leningrad

It is not quite correct to say that the radio recording ' Nine Hundred Days was made *instead* of the book "This Is Radio Leningrad! Such a book is necessary and it will be written yet I recall our plans for it and that far-off night because my own book "This Is Radio Leningrad! is almost entirely composed of my radio broadcasts beginning with December 1941 and ending with June 1945, and each of them was preceded with the words, "This is Radio Leningrad!' This article is a supplemented introduction to the collection, which was first published in 1946

Nikolai Chukovsky

Nikolai Chukovsky (1904 1965) the son of the famous children s writer Kornei Chukovsky took up the pen at a very young age One of his first books entitled *The Masters of Frigates* was about celebrated navigators and explorers Captain Cook La Perouse Vitus Bering and Krusenstern Chukovsky s major work is the novel *Baltic Skies* about the Baltic pilots who fought against the nazi invaders for four long heroic years The novel is based on the personal experience of the author who was with his heroes throughout the blockade and the defence of Leningrad The story A Girl Who Was Life is also about wartime Leningrad

A GIRL WHO WAS LIFE

1

I was still in good shape, though occasionally lights would start dancing before my eyes Fiery cartwheels and red-gold shapes and figures whirled and flickered Then they faded and I could see again I also had periods of memory lapses I would suddenly find myself on a staircase landing without the faintest idea of how I had got there or where I was going

Some people think that hunger is a craving for food But this is only at the beginning then it passes, leaving a gnawing feeling of emptiness in the pit of your stomach I soon got used to this feeling and as for flickering lights and black-outs I didn t mention them to my subordinates I thought it might be bad for morale

It was purely for the sake of morale that I went down to the air-raid shelter I couldn t have made my men go down if I didn t go myself They reasoned that if a bomb hit the house it wouldn t matter where you were on the roof, inside the building, or down in the basement I thought so too, but not going down to the shelter was against regulations, and I couldn t allow that

It was warm and damp in the shelter There had been no electricity for the past two days, and the basement was lit by the yellow flame of an oil lamp without a glass chimney Soot settled on our faces, while the yellow petal of flame was reflected in our eyes When a bomb fell somewhere the flame flickered, both in the lamp and in our eyes A metronome ticked monotonously in the loudspeaker, meaning the all-clear had not yet sounded I would have dozed off on the sodden boards of the plank bed, had it not been for the incessant chatter of Angelina Ivanovna harping on how much weight she had lost Indeed, when I had first set eyes on her here in the basement a few months before she had been a plump blonde

Now her body seemed composed of empty bags She complained that her clothes hung so loose they were practically falling off her and made the other women feel her bones She would soon die she kept on saying her blonde curls shaking

Then she went on to describe how our yard-keeper had died Everyone knew the story, and I had even seen his dead body seated on a wooden bench in the house-manager s office His feet in their big new felt boots were stretched towards the small pot-bellied stove He had come in to warm up the night before and had fallen asleep, never to wake again

There were a few dozen people in the shelter and with the exception of Angelina Ivanovna, no one said a word They were all sick of her whining, but there was no way of escaping it I wondered when she would get tired and shut up When she did finally pause for breath a girl s voice said

What s the use of sitting here? They re bombing beyond the Neva Let s go up on to the roof!

I looked up and saw a girl in a white woollen shawl standing by the iron door In fact, all I saw was a white blur but that was sufficient I jumped up

2

Because of my occasional black-outs I lived in a jumbled somewhat unreal world in which there had lately appeared a girl in a white downy shawl She would materialise suddenly from the gloom and flit past me in the courtyard or on the stairs All I saw was the shawl wrapped around her head and shoulders, sailing through the shadows I would turn to follow it, but it would always disappear around a corner or melt away into the darkness When I caught sight of her now in the shelter, I jumped up and hurried towards the door, but she had already slipped out

I looked back Sumarokov, the compositor, was asleep on the plank bed Tsvetkov, the printer, was also asleep I nipped out of the shelter

The iron door slammed shut behind me and the stutter of AA guns hit my ears Four six-storey walls with black windows surrounded the courtyard It was dark, the only light coming from the patch of sky illuminated by flak I peered into the darkness wondering which way the girl had gone Several doors opened into the yard, and I caught a glimpse of the white shawl disappearing into one of them

We were running up the stairs, the girl keeping a flight ahead of me I could hear her heels on the steps through the clatter of the guns

I saw her kerchief as she turned each landing A flash of light snatched a window out of the darkness and a slim silhouette flitted across it Earlier in the day the effort of climbing a few steps had made me dizzy Now I skipped steps, feeling light and immaterial By the time we reached the third or fourth floor I had almost caught up with her

I know who you are, she said without stopping "You re the editor

Right I said "I m the editor And who are you?

Just a girl

Judging by her voice and the childish ease of her movements I realised she couldn t be more than fifteen

What s your name?

Alexandra

Sasha for short?'

No, Asya

How nice!

What s nice?

That your name is Asya

She said nothing but kept on up the stairs

Does that lame boy work with you? she asked without looking back

You mean Sumarokov? He s in bad shape

Why?

He won t last long "

' He won t die I ll have a talk with him " I laughed "Will you talk him out of it? '

Yes, she said, but she didn't laugh Can I come to the printshop?

Of course

Does Angelina Ivanovna ever come?

Yes

You shouldn't let her She s the one that kills people

Suddenly cartwheels began spinning in front of my eyes, and blood pounded in my ears like a roaring waterfall

3

When I came to I was standing on a landing leaning against the wall

It ll pass in a moment, a voice said next to me

The spinning wheels and sparks gradually faded, the buzzing stopped

I m all right I said

She took my hand Her shawl seemed a white blur in the gloom I could hear her breathing Her hand was small and warm

Have you a torch? she asked

I had but I used it sparingly to save the battery

Give it to me '

I handed her the torch She turned it on me and I squinted in the bright light while she looked me over from head to foot

Your jacket is unbuttoned

I knew that It had no buttons When the Germans took the town where I had been editing the local paper I set out on foot to Leningrad That was in August, three months ago it had been warm and I hadn t even taken a coat In Leningrad I was issued a padded jacket with no buttons

Asya switched off the torch and dropped it into my pocket

I ve got some safety pins

Never mind

It s no bother Just keep still a moment she mumbled through clenched teeth, and I guessed that she had a pin in her mouth

She reached out for my collar

At that moment the drawn out rumble of the exploding bombs shook the house I was afraid she would prick me but her hands were steady

That was beyond the Neva, she said raising her voice above the chatter of the guns as she fastened the pin

Here we are," she said when we had reached the top pushing open a low door

I followed her through it and saw the sky

4

There is nothing more solemn than a starry autumn sky, calm and still This, however, was not the sky I beheld Far from it Lit up by the smocky flares it flickered and shuddered restlessly Our roof seemed to be sailing through the dancing lights rolling like a ship at sea

I tried to take it all in in the light of the momentary flashes as I picked my way gingerly along the rattling slope of the roof The shell blasts echoed and hailed one another across the huge sky At every flash the fires went out the stars disappeared and for a split second roofs, spires, bridges and the gaping holes of city squares leaped out of the darkness Then all was black again save for the spotty glow in the dark sky

A ring of fire surrounded the city. It was brightest to the south and south-west where burning Ligovo and Strelna seemed like a river of molten gold. It was the noose around our neck, invisible in daylight but ever present. At night it stood out in bold relief. I could see it now, the deadly noose which was slowly tightening around our necks. I could have choked with hatred and rage.

Asya stood behind me, a little higher up the roof. She gazed over my head, the flickering lights reflected in her eyes, her slim erect body wrapped in the white shawl.

"They want us all to die," she said, "but we'll live and live and live just to spite them!"

5

When I entered the printshop next morning Sumarokov didn't get up from his stool. Though I had never demanded it, my two subordinates had always risen to greet me. Sumarokov sat now with his legs stretched towards the iron stove in which paper scrap was burning. His lame leg was the reason for his deferment and the greatest disappointment of his life. Nineteen years old, born and bred in a city of seamen, his sole dream had once been of serving in the navy. Now he didn't care. He had grown listless and taciturn, his thin, dirty face–for he had stopped washing a long time ago–expressed nothing but suffering.

"Good morning," Tsvetkov greeted me. He was leaning against the press.

Tsvetkov was a middle-aged man, deferred because he suffered from asthma. His wife had died the week before.

"How are things?" I asked.

"No electricity," Tsvetkov replied.

Our printshop's equipment consisted of four cases of type and an electrically driven flat-bed cylinder press. There had been no electricity for three days now, and I realised there would be none in the future.

"What shall we do?" I said.

Sumarokov was silent.

"I don't know," Tsvetkov said.

"Change the date in the set," I said to Sumarokov.

The issue had been set and mounted three days ago. I only told him to change the date to see whether he would get up. I was afraid he couldn't. He did, however, and limped over to the machine, almost losing his balance on the way. He seemed strangely pleased by this display of weakness.

He bent over the set
Has anyone been here? I asked Tsvetkov
'The woman from next door
What woman?
Angelina
I wonder who ll die first me or her? Sumarokov said
I could imagine what the two of them had talked about
Sumarokov fumbled with the set for some time, although he only had to change the date
Can t you get a move on?
Just a sec
I became impatient
Never mind, I said "I ll do it myself
He stepped aside readily and returned to his stool I changed the type They were both looking at me to see what I would do next There was no electricity
They don t care whether the paper comes out or not I thought, and it made me angry Yet only a few days ago I had been pleased with their attitude towards the job We had made a good team I went up to the flywheel and began pulling off the belt Sumarokov looked on listlessly, but Tsvetkov, I saw guessed my intention I had decided to turn the wheel by hand
Here we go, I said to Tsvetkov
He walked up to the machine, took a sheet of paper and placed it on the drum
Sumarokov, I called
Sumarokov rose slowly from his stool
'Turn the wheel for a while '
He gave me a surprised look but said nothing For a few moments he stood still, then with the same look, he went to the wheel, grasped the handle with both hands and pushed
He put his whole weight to the handle but the wheel did not move I thought he was shamming
Come on! Get going!
His neck became red with the exertion I realised he was doing his best and felt sorry for him In fact I had never stopped feeling sorry but my helplessness had made me angry
Sit down, I said, going over to the wheel
I had turned the wheel of a flat-bed press before, and as I recalled it, it turned fairly easily I pushed the handle and wondered why it didn t move Then I put my whole weight to it The handle went down slowly, moving the spokes around lazily
The wheel made a complete turn and stopped One printed

sheet crawled out of the press. Beads of sweat stood out on my forehead and I gasped for breath. Making a supreme effort, I pushed the handle again. The wheel made another turn. Sparks danced before my eyes. As I stood up to catch my breath, the sparks vanished. I met Tsvetkov's eyes. There was pity in them, but I don't like to be pitied, so I pushed the handle again.

The wheel made another turn.

I continued to push while sparks danced before my eyes. The wheel made another turn. I pushed the handle, the wheel turned –another turn, and yet another. I put my whole body into it, but it was hard going. I gasped for air, the buzzing in my ears grew louder and louder. I saw nothing but sparks, heard nothing but buzzing. I felt Tsvetkov was standing next to me and shouting. He pulled me away from the wheel and grasped the handle and it was only then I realised he wanted to take my place.

I leaned against the wall panting as the room spun around. I was afraid I would faint as I had so many times before. That would be the worst thing that could happen, for then they would realise it was impossible to turn the wheel. I steeled myself, went to Tsvetkov's place, picked up a sheet of paper and placed it on the drum.

Tsvetkov had the wheel going at the first try. The sheet slipped along the drum and came out printed. Another sheet, then another.

Tsvetkov's unshaven face was white. His eyes were starting out of his head. Slowly he turned the wheel, the spokes flicked by, and with each turn his face grew paler. Another turn, another turn, another. . . .

He let go of the handle and sagged sideways. I stood there with a clean sheet in my hand and watched him fall.

He slumped away from the wheel and lay face downwards on the floor, his back heaving.

I counted the printed sheets. There were twenty-two of them. We had turned the wheel twenty-two times. We needed to print at least five hundred copies. Each sheet on two sides. Two turns of the wheel to a copy. A thousand turns!

One thousand!

Tsvetkov's cot stood in one corner of the room. I went over to it and lay down.

6

Tsvetkov and Sumarokov had been living in the printshop since the beginning of the siege. Tsvetkov slept next to the press. Sumarokov had moved his cot into a tiny room the size of a cupboard.

He had kept it very clean, but since October, when real hunger had set in, it had been collecting dust and grime

Is this your picture? a small clear voice asked behind the door

Yes Sumarokov s voice replied

When did you take it?

Last July

So that s what you were like!

'That s what I was like Sumarokov echoed with a kind of pride I m thinner now but it s hardly surprising

Not much thinner Grimier, though

That s from the stove, Sumarokov explained gloomily

I lay on Tsvetkov s cot, wondering who he was speaking to Suddenly I realised it was Asya!

What are these ships? she asked

I guessed that she was looking through Sumarokov s album his most prized possession Every evening after work he would pull out the beautifully bound album and pore over it for hours It was filled with photographs of Sumarokov in a great variety of poses There were also pictures of war ships Under each of these pictures was a wealth of information, of unknown origin and reliability There were also stills from films and lines of verse copied out in a fine hand The letters were adorned with flourishes which, one felt were more important than the verses

I hadn t seen the album in Sumarokov s hands for over a month I thought he had forgotten about it and was surprised to hear him going through it now They looked at the photographs while he told Asya about the ships She asked him questions which he answered at length pleased and flattered by her attention

Then she entered the printshop For the first time I was able to have a good look at her in broad daylight Could this be the girl whose mysterious white shawl I had pursued the night before up the stairs from darkness into light, and back into darkness illumined by blinding flashes? There was nothing mysterious about her now In fact her shawl wasn t even very white She was rather big for her age Her almost childish face bore the imprint of aging which hunger brands on all women s faces

I wasn t at all happy at being caught lying on a bed in the middle of the working day, but I decided to stay where I was There was no use pretending we were busy if the paper couldn t come out anyway

She nodded to me, walked over to the silent press and inspected

it with interest She saw the newly printed sheets and read the name of the paper, *Water-Transport Worker*

Ship Repairs for Victory She read the title of my editorial

Is anyone repairing ships now?

Strange as it may seem yes

Why should it seem strange?

Because it s much harder to repair a ship than to publish a newspaper

There s no electricity Tsvetkov remarked We re too weak to turn the wheel

Sumarokov walked into the room I had not seen him look like that for more than a month His face was freshly washed, his hair was combed and shining, his boots were polished and under his unbuttoned jacket he wore a striped sailor s vest He hardly limped at all It was as if he had just sprained his ankle slightly

I ve never seen how a newspaper is printed, Asya said "I d really like to She took hold of the wheel handle

It moved agonisingly slowly Her gaunt cheeks flushed with the effort as the spokes slid slowly by

It s hard, Sumarokov said ' Let me help you He stood next to her and grabbed the handle They turned the wheel together grinning with pleasure as well as with the strain

Where s some paper? Asya asked Let s print it

Tsvetkov took his place a sheet rolled over the drum and slid out printed

Asya laughed

Another sheet and another

You re tired Sumarokov said in a tone which suggested that he would never tire Let me do it alone

She shook her head

It s easy when you do it together, she said The faster the wheel turns, the easier it goes Let s make it spin

The spokes flashed by quicker and quicker, Tsvetkov s hands moved faster as he inserted the clean sheets She was right The faster the wheel turned, the less effort it took to keep it spinning

It was a great discovery

Let me do it alone ' Sumarokov said, pushing her gently away

She stepped back a pace or two while he, feeling her eyes upon him, turned the handle with an expression of grim concentration He hardly had to stoop now having only to give the handle a slight push as it rushed up towards him

I got up from my cot

How many copies? I asked Tsvetkov

A hundred and nineteen he said A hundred and twenty a hundred and twenty-one

"Let me do it! ' I cried to Sumarokov stepping quickly into his place so as to keep the wheel spinning

I pushed the handle carelessly, with quick, easy movements The machine rattled heavily and the sheets slid out

If we had something decent to eat we d have it humming Sumarokov remarked behind my back As it is, we re liable to kick the bucket any time

You won t, as long as you keep the paper going Asya said

7

But soon the newspaper stopped coming out And Sumarokov died And many, many other people died Bodies lay in every flat of our bleak six-storey house There was no one to bury them

Tsvetkov was transferred to an army printshop He left with his suitcase one snowy day and I never saw him again I remained alone in the printshop I couldn t simply walk away, leaving the press the type and the newsprint behind I had my superiors so I waited for orders As the city exchange wasn't working I couldn't get in touch with them by phone In any case, they knew of my existence and of the plight of the printshop

There was nothing for me to do but to wait I moved into Sumarokov s little room The window-panes were intact There was even a tin stove in which I could burn old copies of our paper and bits of furniture When it got really cold, however, the stove was of little use Day and night I lay on the cot in my jacket and felt boots under two blankets my own and Sumarokov s There was a big sheet of heavy blue paper over the window for the black-out At first I used to take it down in the morning and then put it up again Soon I gave up and my room stayed dark all day

Every other day I got up and went down to the bakery for my bread ration The glittering snow in the street dazzled me and the cold wind made breathing difficult Thus I would stumble along the narrow path winding through huge snow drifts that smoked in the wind In the bakery I received a frozen cube of bread, my ration for two days Many people began eating their bread right there in the shop the moment they received it Not I, I stuffed it inside my padded jacket, closer to my body, and walked home My head spun on the way back A mist covered my eyes It was not an unpleasant sensation On the contrary, the idea of lying down

in the snow and never, never moving again was both compelling and comforting There seemed nothing so terrible about the corpses half-buried in the snow But I must eat my bread first, I told myself, and kept going Back in my room I hastened to the cot, pulled the blankets over my head and lay in the darkness, pinching little pieces of bread from the chunk I rolled each piece around in my mouth before swallowing it Then I fell asleep

Perhaps it was not sleep In the complete silence that surrounded me I could never be sure The city seemed wrapped in a deathly pall, as if it had sunk to the bottom of the sea No trams, no automobiles, no voices broke the stillness With winter the air-raids ceased, and the AA guns stopped their clattering The Germans all around the city probably thought they simply had to wait until all life died or froze No sound broke the dead silence of my room I sank into it deeper and deeper, cot and all Somewhere, way up high lay the world of light, people and warmth, but I was going down down, endlessly down, and there was no bottom below

I would awaken once in a while with the knowledge that I was dying It occurred to me that I ought to get up, find some chips and kindle the stove But the thought of moving was unbearable Death seemed so much simpler I waited calmly for it to claim me and sank ever deeper into the stillness

8

You re alive! You re alive! Get up!

A loud ringing voice came calling down my bottomless pit I stopped sinking Something bore me up, up, up, the blankets slid off my face and there was light The blue sheet was gone from the window Bright daylight streamed in through the frosty glass Asya stood over me, shouting triumphantly

You re alive! Angelina Ivanovna said there was no one left in the printshop, she said you were dead But here I came and you re alive! We ll get things going now!

I looked at her and felt myself smiling Of course I m alive She was so triumphant, so happy at finding me alive that it would have been a shame to have turned out dead I looked at her and smiled, happy that she, too, was alive She had changed The terrible stamp of age put on her young face by hunger had deepened But she moved about and talked and was happy We were both alive!

Here we go, here we go, she kept saying as she kindled the little stove

I had thought that there was nothing left to burn in the print-shop except the type cases, but she searched the rooms and found a box room in which Sumarokov and Tsvetkov had kept old boards, chips of wood and chunks of coal Soon the little stove was crackling merrily and spots of red glowed on the black pipe

I ll bring some water, she said picking up the big copper tea-kettle

Alone again, I panicked I was afraid she wouldn t come back She wore felt boots and walked so quietly that the sounds of her steps died as soon as the door had closed behind her Come back Keeper of Life I whispered Come back! I knew that the only water-tap in the building that was still working at all was down in the basement, in the air-raid shelter I pictured her running down the stairs with the kettle, crossing the courtyard going down into the basement and standing in the dark in front of the tap It would take a long time for the trickle of water to fill the kettle Even so, she seemed to have been gone an age something must have happened to her Come back, Keeper of Life! I prayed

And when I had almost given up hope the girl who was life returned

9

As she came in with the heavy kettle, obviously far too heavy for her to carry, I felt ashamed to be lying on the cot After all her bread ration was no bigger than mine I tossed the blankets aside dropped my feet to the floor and stood up

There you are! I knew you could get up

Of course I can, I said cheerfully, and just to prove how fit I was I took a board and began hacking off slivers of wood with a knife and tossing them into the stove

She pulled off her gloves and stretched her hands over the kettle to warm them Her hands were tiny, but the fingers were swollen and stiff The skin was cracked and pussy around the nails I knew what that meant my hands were like that too She caught sight of Sumarokov s photograph album on the window-sill It seemed a thing from another world, a world in which Sumarokov had lived and in which we had still had enough strength to turn the wheel of the printing press She opened the album and leafed through the pages

May I have it?

Of course '

The room got warmer I unfastened the safety pins and threw my

jacket open The kettle gurgled its song, steam spurted from the spout and the lid jiggled up and down with a loud clatter Asya filled two mugs with hot water We sat crosslegged on the cot sipping the scalding water It was gloriously hot, sweat broke out on our faces, we burnt our lips and looked at each other happily A wonderful feeling of comradeship bound us, two living creatures She peered at me over the rim of her mug with an impish look Aren t we clever, she seemed to be saying Aren t we clever to be alive!

She told me that she had wanted to join the army and become a sniper Her eyesight was very sharp, she said She would have perched somewhere on top of a pine-tree and waited for a German to move in the bushes Then, bang!–and that would have been the end of him! Last autumn a sergeant she knew told her she could become a sniper

Why didn t you go?

Because of Mother I couldn t leave her alone

Is your mother sick?

She has been for the past two months She s swelling She s got this big

I knew that people not only got thin from hunger, they swelled, too I asked no more

Why aren t you in the army? she asked

I was deferred I was supposed to have an operation but then the war began '

What was wrong?

I ve got a duodenal ulcer

The duodenum is the most important intestine in the human body We studied that at school That s why you were so skinny and yellow when I first saw you

When was that?

At the end of September, when the printshop moved into our house I met you on the staircase lots of times Don t you remember?

No

I wanted to see how a newspaper was printed I was even going to peep through a crack I knew all the workers by sight–the lame boy, and you You were very thin when everyone else was still healthy Does your ulcer still bother you?

It doesn t matter any more

I told her what a disappointment it had been to have been assigned to edit a newspaper instead of being called up for service And now there wasn t even any newspaper

"What are you waiting for here then?"

"For orders."

"How long have you been waiting?"

I tried to remember how long ago Tsvetkov had left. How many days had I spent on my cot? Six, I thought, but when I tried to count them it was more.

"You won't get any orders," she said.

That was what I had been thinking, but her conviction surprised me.

"Why not?"

"Everyone is very weak. Your chief only gets as much bread as you do."

She was right. In the face of hunger all men are equal.

"If I could only phone them," I ventured. "But the phones aren't working."

"Go there."

I laughed out loud.

"Do you know where it is? It's down at the port."

"Yes, that's a long way to go."

"I'll fall down and freeze to death."

"Maybe," she said simply. "But it all depends on you."

"No, it doesn't," I objected. "I just know I haven't got the strength."

She stared at me over the rim of her mug and said nothing. I, too, was silent. The hot water, the warm room and her presence made me feel too contented to argue or worry. She poured me another mug of water.

"When did you wash last?" she asked suddenly.

Indeed, I thought with some embarrassment, when? It had been a long time ago. All the bath houses in the city had been closed since autumn, and it had been unbearable to undress in the cold printshop. It was weeks since I had even taken off my jacket.

"The kettle is still nearly full," she said. "I'll go out and you wash. Go on, before the room gets cold."

She got up clutching Sumarokov's album.

"Do you really have to go?"

"Mother's all alone," she replied gently. She knew that I would be frightened and lonely without her. She was fully aware of her moral superiority and though I was twice her age, she treated me like a child. "Wash, then go to bed, and tomorrow morning go to the port."

Seeing the hesitation in my eyes, she added:

You ll make it People are really much stronger than they think

How do you know? '

From experience You've got to make it and you will '

10

And I did

As soon as I got out into the street the cold wind hit me with a stinging blast of snow I would never reach the port, I knew it My legs buckled and I swayed like a reed in the wind All I wanted to do was to lie down in the snow and close my eyes I ll lie down at the next corner, I thought But when I got to it I kept on going, stumbling on to the next After all, it didn t really matter where I lay down to die Thus I reached the bridge, crossed the Neva, turned into a long street and trudged on, past bombed-out houses, past gutted houses, past frozen houses The narrow path took me between snow-drifts covering the bodies of those who had gone before me I knew that soon I, too, would be lying under a heap of snow, a dark, frozen fist sticking out, and I wasn t at all afraid But if I could make an extra five steps, I would By dusk I had fought my way down the entire length of the street, and I made it I was stronger than I thought

No one recognised me I told them who I was They were surprised, for I had been written off as dead I was put up with the shipyard workers who lived in a barge frozen into the river It was warm there and a mobile generator fed a dim electric bulb A month before there had been more than a hundred men living inside the huge ribbed belly of the barge But many had died, and now there were plenty of empty beds They found one for me

The dining-room was in a neighbouring compartment There was a red slogan strung over the tables 'All eyes on the food department! It had been hung up in autumn, when people still believed that if they kept careful count of all food their rations would see them through The engineers brought a pair of precision scales from the laboratory and set it up on the counter One could make sure one received one's 3 grams of sugar and not 2 99 grams Whether this helped at all I can t say, but the inhabitants of the barge were dying just as quickly as those in the houses Only forty men reported for work The rest remained on their cots, too weak to get up

In a day or two I also reported for work I was a bit wobbly on my legs, but I already knew that I was stronger than I thought If I could make it to the port, I was fit to work

When I was still in my teens and dreaming of becoming a journalist, I had worked as a fitter's apprentice in a railway workshop. I was not much of a fitter, but no great skill was required here. We were patching up an old freighter ripped open by a bomb. Its side, frozen into the ice, towered like a cliff over our barge. The worst part of the job was climbing the gangplank to the deck where I was assigned to a riveting and welding team. Inside the vessel, which lay tilted to port, we moved about like shadows. It was like a slow-motion film. When we had to lift or move something we all put our shoulders to it, and then sank to the floor half-conscious, gasping for breath.

Whenever we sat down we felt sure we would never get up again. But I no longer believed that. I told myself that as long as we worked we would stay alive. The nazis wanted us to die, I said, and that was why we wouldn't. I knew I was repeating somebody else's words, and I knew whose words they were. And we got up again.

I soon felt stronger, though I don't know why. In the middle of the winter our rations were increased, but the increase was so small that people continued to die as before. Perhaps it was the soup, that warm, brackish water we received twice a day, or it might have been our doctor, who believed in vitamins and made us drink a brew of pine needles. Most likely it was being with people and our team work, which always makes things easier. I walked better, spent less time in bed, and did not tire so when I climbed the gangplank. The most surprising thing was the fiery cartwheels I began to see again: they had vanished when I had been so low. And another vaguely remembered feeling returned: I was ravenously hungry again.

I was as hungry and craving for food as in the very first days, when I had just begun to starve. I gulped down my soup and felt like licking my plate. I no longer ate my bread in tiny morsels under the blanket but wolfed it down immediately I received it. Paper, plaster, bricks—all seemed edible. This newly awakened driving hunger led me to crime.

There were a dozen big tins of oil in the ship. We knew it was industrial oil, used as a paint solvent. We also knew it was inedible, and no one touched it. But one day someone discovered that it looked exactly like sunflower oil. The discovery excited even the most level-headed among us. Our voices rose, our movements became hurried, our hands shook. We attacked the oil, vying with each other in greed and foolhardiness. In our hearts we knew the end could be horrible, but we drove the thought away and infected

each other with daring Satiation intoxicated us We shouted and jostled each other After gorging on the oil we took the remaining tins to the barge and fed our bed-ridden comrades

That night nine men died They suffered terribly, writhing and screaming with pain We stared at them cowed with fear each man waiting for his turn to come Some said that the oil had glued their intestines together The next two days six more men died I was gripped by fear and remorse for I had taken part in the feast and had eaten as much as any But my ailing intestines, once so sensitive pulled me through somehow I ll never know how or why The only after-effect I suffered was shock Now only twenty-five of us reported for work

11

Life on the barge could not make me forget Asya I had only to close my eyes and she would appear before me She fastened my jacket, she brought me water, she made me get up when I thought that I would never get up again She made me live when I was ready to die

The first few weeks the mere thought of walking the long way back to her seemed impossible But the days went by and my conscience gave me no peace Here I was in a warm room with an electric light, while she was in that bleak, dark house Was she still alive? Could she walk? Who brought her bread from the bakery and water from the basement, who heated her stove? I had to see her But I didn t want to go empty-handed What good would it do to go to her if I couldn t bring her something to eat?

At first I thought of putting away some bread, a bit from my daily chunk, drying the pieces for her But I gave up the idea It would take a week to amass a few ounces She could die by then even if she were alive now Besides after a week on a reduced ration I might not be able to get to her

Then one day we were each issued a package of dried buckwheat, enough to make a whole plateful of porridge I decided to go at once I had no difficulty in getting permission The printshop equipment was still my responsibility and I had to keep an eye on it I ate my plate of soup, put the package in my pocket and started on my way

The winter dragged on endlessly but the days were beginning to get longer Still, it was dusk by the time I crossed the bridge, turned one corner, then another, and again saw the familiar house and gateway

There was not a single footprint on the snow-powdered path that led to the gateway Black iron stove-pipes stuck out of many windows, but not a single wisp of smoke rose from any of them Under the arch of the gateway the wind was piercing The court-yard was empty There was not a single footprint on the narrow paths between the drifts of snow that now reached to the first floor Did no one go down to the basement for water? I unlocked the door of the printshop and entered Nothing had changed In the corners there were little piles of snow which had blown in through a hole in the window pane Crystals of ice sparkled on the metal press I looked into Sumarokov s room There, too, nothing had changed The unmade bed was just as I had left it

There was nothing for me to do there I went out and locked the door Now I could go to Asya, if I only knew where she lived I had never been in her home I had a vague idea that she lived higher up she had frequently run upstairs past the printshop But there were so many storeys and so many flats!

I went out into the yard, hoping to meet somebody and find out whether there was still anyone alive in the house This time I was lucky A small, bent old woman bundled in numerous shawls appeared from behind a snowdrift and waddled towards me at a fairly brisk pace

How do you do, she said So you re alive I thought you died in December

Yes, I m alive How do you do

Don t you recognise me? I ve got thinner, haven t I?

Then I recognised her It was Angelina Ivanovna If she hadn t spoken I should never have known who she was In the autumn she had been a plump young woman with rosy cheeks and a loud voice When she began to lose weight her curves had gradually become flaps of skin Now even the flaps were gone She had grown smaller The shawls apparently concealed a shrivelled skin pulled over her bones

They ve all died! All of them! she said when I asked whether Asya, the girl who had run about in a white woollen shawl, was still alive They ve all died in all the flats She seemed to derive satisfaction from the fact that everyone had died, thus proving she had been right I m still alive, but I ll be going soon Asya? She wouldn't face up to reality She carried water for others and made people get up and walk, but you can t fight death First her mother died, then she

There was nothing left for me to do but return to the port But I hesitated I didn t quite trust Angelina Ivanovna After all, she

had once told Asya that I was dead I couldn t go without making sure

They lived in thirty-nine, Angelina Ivanovna said indignant because I refused to believe her "On the fifth floor Go on up if you can climb that high

I climbed to the fifth floor

12

Is that you?

Yes, yes! It s me!

Is it really you?

Yes!

How strange!

What?

She spoke in a whisper Perhaps I had not understood

How strange!

I had discovered her in the far room of a large flat I had knocked on the door outside, but seeing that it was not locked, I pushed it open That winter people didn t bother locking doors, so as not to waste any strength opening them

The hall inside was as cold as the staircase The windows were heavily curtained I called out several times, but no one replied I pulled out my torch light The battery was nearly spent, so that it cast but a dim spot of light I opened door after door, and the dim light slid along the walls All the furniture had been burned Cold, black stove-pipes rose in the rooms Beds from which mattresses had been burned stood like iron skeletons I tripped over frozen bodies that lay on the floor They were old women and boys She wasn't among them Where could she be? Something moved soundlessly in a corner I lifted the torch and saw my own reflection in a mirror

A narrow strip of daylight came from under one door I pushed it open

The winter dusk poured into the room through an uncurtained window A clock hung on the wall, the pendulum swinging to and fro ticking with an eerie sound in the silence If the clock was going someone had obviously pulled up the weights Two beds stood along the walls One was empty There was a pile of old clothes on the other I pulled back an edge and saw Asya s face

It was again a vague white blur in the gloom I dropped to my knees and put my ear to her lips She was breathing She was asleep

I didn t want to wake her I decided to kindle the stove first and cook the porridge I found some firewood and water–to my surprise, she had a supply of both Why hadn t she lit the stove then, why was it so cold in the room? The water in the pail was covered with a thick layer of ice By the time I had kindled the stove and warmed the water it was already dark I was squatting before the open door of the stove when suddenly I felt her looking at me

I got up She recognised me and kept repeating How strange! I couldn t understand what was so strange

' Isn t it strange? Strange that I ve woken up again Strange that you re here You did get to the port! I knew you would Only I didn t think I d ever see you again Isn t it strange? Strange that I m dying

She spoke softly but I heard every word

You won t die, I said

That s what I told people, too but they died anyway

You told me I wouldn t die and I didn t

I knew you wouldn t In the beginning I used to be mistaken but by the time I found you on the cot in the shop I could always tell I had seen so many people die by then I know so much about death and nothing about life Isn t it strange?

It ll be warm in a moment, I said, stirring the fire with a poker It s warm already Can t you feel it?

"No I can t feel anything any more But I m glad you re warm I can t feel my hands or feet It s as if they weren t there at all I m not here any longer, either My head is still alive, though, and I m just waiting for it to go out '

I said nothing as I watched the steam rising from the little pot When the water boils, I thought, I ll take the package out of my pocket, pour the contents into the pot and cook the porridge She ll stop speaking of death when she smells the porridge

I kept going as long as Mother was alive, she said I fetched bread and water and heated the stoves Not only for Mother For others, too I knew all the stoves in the house I didn t want them to die I wanted them to live and live, and live Mother screamed and cried when she was dying She couldn t understand what was happening She didn t even recognise me but she was in great pain How can you be in pain when you re unconscious? It must be awful I don t feel anything at all When Mother stopped screaming and froze I dragged her into the other room and left her on the floor Then I fell down I couldn t walk I had to crawl back It took me a whole hour '

When was that?"

I don t know Long ago

Yesterday? '

No Much earlier A week ago No, three or four days ago If it were a week, the clock would have stopped "

I looked at the clock One weight stood at the very top, the other had almost reached the floor I pulled it up

When I die the clock will keep on going Isn't it strange!"

You won t die! ' I interrupted her "Look what I ve brought you!

The water in the pot was boiling I pulled out the package and showed it to Asya

What s that? '

Porridge!

' Oh, she said indifferently

' Porridge! Porridge! I repeated as I dumped the contents into the pot You'll have porridge A whole bowlful!"

She said nothing I thought she didn t understand or perhaps did not believe me But she understood

You brought it for me instead of eating it yourself, ' she said But I don t need it You eat it I ll watch you

No, you ll eat it! '

I can t Look

She showed me something but it was too dark to see

' Here she said "Give me your hand Here, under the pillow

I shoved my hand under her pillow and pulled out several slices of bread

' You ve got bread!"

Eat it she said

But what about you? Why didn t you eat it?"

I can t I can t keep it down When I swallow a piece it comes up again I know what that means

I said nothing I also knew what it meant

When did it start? I asked softly

Long ago When Mother was still alive '

And you haven t eaten anything since then? '

"No I feel better this way I ve seen it happen so many times I can t eat any more

I had also seen it happen and I knew that when a person's stomach stopped producing juices he would eat no more And yet, I continued to press her

But this is porridge, not dry bread It s soft, warm porridge!"

"Please, don t!

I said no more

It was dark The stove cast spots of crimson light on the floor and walls Asya was silent I sat looking at her trying to guess whether her eyes were open or not I couldn t see her face in the dark nor could I hear her breathing over the humming of the stove and the ticking of the clock I thought she had stopped breathing Then she said something

I didn t catch the words and asked her what she had said

She repeated them and again I didn t hear her I sat on the edge of the bed and bent over her

'The snow s melting, she whispered The sun shined into the window and I could see the drops falling It s melting in the sun

A little bit, I said Only a little

"Spring will come and I won t see it How strange! When I die it won t matter to me any more will it? It doesn t matter to those who have gone, does it?

' No, it doesn t

' That s the strangest thing of all It always mattered to me I can t imagine that it can stop mattering

It will always matter to those who remain alive We ll show those damn fools, surrounding the city keeping watch over us

Who?

Them!

During the blockade we never mentioned the Germans by name They were just they

Don t speak of them I don t want to think of them now

I said nothing It was not easy to die hating

I want to think of you, the last person I ll ever see Her voice was so weak I had to bend close to her lips to hear her You ve come to me, and I m not alone I kept on thinking surely someone will come It would have been so unfair otherwise And you came Tell me, have you ever been in love? Has anyone ever loved you? It must be nice to be in love and to be loved Tell me

But I didn't tell her In my thirty years I had loved and been loved more times than I cared to remember It wasn t easy and it hurt, sometimes it had been my fault, and sometimes the fault of the ones I had loved, I couldn't explain it to her, who had never been in love

"One day I think I loved a boy We were on the swing in the yard We swung so high we nearly flew into a third-storey window Every time we flew up he would stoop towards me I could tell he wanted to kiss me I ll never swing again How strange!"

She was silent for a while Then she said

Kiss me for him

I bent down, searched for her lips in the dark and touched them with mine

That s right she said

13

I returned to the port next morning The following day I turned up for a medical check-up The doctor X-rayed me and found no ulcer Hunger had cured me I joined the army and next winter we broke through the blockade Two years later I witnessed the siege of Berlin It lasted less than a fortnight

Vassily Grossman

Vassily Grossman was born in 1905 in Berdichev Upon graduation from a chemistry institute he went to the Donbas mining district to work and his first story Gluckauf was dedicated to the miners During the war he worked as a front line correspondent for *Krasnaya Zvezda* where his story The People Are Immortal was printed in 1942 Vassily Grossman was with the army all the way on its long road to victory from the Volga to Berlin The story included in this collection entitled In the Line of the Main Attack was written in 1942 and is dedicated to the heroic defenders of Stalingrad

He died in 1964

IN THE LINE OF THE MAIN ATTACK

In the night Colonel Gurtiev's Siberian troops took up defensive positions. A factory always looks rather stark and gloomy, but one could surely find no scene in the world more gloomy than the one these men saw on that October morning in 1942: the dark mass of the workshops, the wet, gleaming rails already rusted here and there, the wrecked goods wagons, the piles of steel tubes scattered around the vast yard, as large as a city square, the brown slag heaps and mounds of coal, the great factory pipes, damaged in many places by enemy shells. The asphalted yard was pock-marked with bomb craters and scattered everywhere were steel splinters torn off by explosions, like thin shreds of material. The Division was to take up positions in front of the plant and stand to the death. Behind was the cold, dark Volga.

During the night the sappers broke up the asphalt and dug trenches with picks in the hard, stony ground, cut firing-holes in the strong walls of the workshops, and made shelters in the cellars of the ruined buildings. The Barricades Plant was to be defended by Markelov's and Mikhalyev's regiments. One of the command posts was set up in a concrete-lined canal that passed beneath the main workshops. Sergeyenko's regiment was defending the deep ravine which ran down to the Volga through the Barricades Garden City. The officers and men of the regiment called it the Ravine of Death. Yes, behind was the dark, icy-cold Volga, behind was the fate of Russia. The Division was to make a stand and fight to the death.

The First World War was a terrible ordeal for Russia, but then the fiendish foe had had to divide his forces between the Eastern and the Western fronts. In this war the whole crushing weight of the German invasion had fallen on Russia. In January 1941 the German

armies were advancing along the entire front stretching from sea to sea This year, 1942, the Germans were concentrating their attack in the south-eastern direction What in the First World War had been spread over two fronts manned by several great powers what last year struck Russia alone along a two-thousand-mile front crashed down this summer and autumn on Stalingrad and the Caucasus Moreover, here in Stalingrad the Germans had renewed their onslaught on the northern and central districts of the city The Germans showered the murderous fire of countless mortars and thousands of guns on the northern part of the city on the industrial area in the centre of which stood the Barricades Plant The Germans reckoned that no human being could stand up to such punishment that no hearts or nerves in the world could fail to crack up in that inferno of fire, screaming metal, quaking earth and seething air The whole fiendish arsenal of German militarism was concentrated here–tanks and flame-throwers, six-barrel mortars armadas of dive-bombers with wailing sirens, and personnel and demolition bombs The tommy-gunners were supplied with explosive bullets the artillery and mortar teams with incendiary shells Every kind of German artillery was concentrated here from small-calibre anti-tank guns to heavy, long-range pieces They fired mortar shells that looked like harmless green and red balls, and air torpedos, that made craters the size of a two-storey house Here the night was as bright as day from the glow of fires and rockets, while in the day-time it was dark as night with the smoke from burning houses and the German smoke-screens The din was as solid as the earth itself, and the brief moments of silence seemed more terrible and threatening than the din of battle And if the whole world bows its head to the heroism of the Russian armies, if the Russian armies speak in pious tones of the defenders of Stalingrad, here in Stalingrad itself, Shumilov s men say with deep respect

It s not us The lads who are holding the plants they re the ones It s an awesome sight there s a solid cloud of fire and smoke and German dive-bombers above them day and night, but Chuikov s still holding out

These are grim words for a soldier, the line of the main attack are grave, terrible words There are no more terrible words in war and it was naturally no accident that the men of Gurtiev s Siberian Division were sent on that dismal autumn day to defend the plant The Siberians are tough, sturdy people, used to cold and privation fond of discipline and order, reticent and gruff The Siberians are solid and reliable In tight-lipped silence they struck at the stony ground with their picks, cutting firing-holes in the workshop walls,

making dugouts, entrenchments and communication trenches, preparing for the fight to the death

Colonel Gurtiev is a lean man of fifty When the First World War broke out in 1914 he left the St Petersburg Polytechnic where he was studying in his second year to volunteer for the army, and fought as a gunner at Warsaw, Baranovichi and Chartoriisk

Gurtiev has been in the army for twenty-eight years, seeing active service and training officers His two sons went off to the front as lieutenants He has left his wife and daughter behind in far-away Omsk On this terrible and solemn day he thought of his lieutenant sons, his daughter and his wife, and the many young officers he had trained, and his whole long, hard, Spartan life The time has come when all the principles of military science, morale and duty which he taught his sons, his pupils and fellow soldiers will be put to the test, and he looked anxiously at the faces of the Siberians–the men from Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk and Barnaul–the men with whom it was his destiny to repel the enemy onslaught

The Siberians came to the Volga well-prepared The Division had been well-trained before being sent to the front Colonel Gurtiev had trained his men thoroughly and wisely, had never stood for any nonsense and if anything had been over-exacting He knew that however hard military training might be–the night practice raids the lying in trenches and slits being ironed' by tanks, the long forced marches–the real thing was far grimmer He had faith in the fortitude and stamina of his Siberians He had tested it on the way to the front, when throughout the whole long journey there had been only one incident one of the soldiers had dropped his rifle from the moving train, and had leapt down, picked it up and run three kilometres to the next station to rejoin his regiment He had tested their stamina in the Stalingrad steppes, where his men had had their baptism of fire and calmly repelled a surprise attack of thirty German tanks He had tested their endurance during the last leg of the march to Stalingrad, when they had covered two hundred kilometres in forty-eight hours Yet he still looked anxiously at the faces of the men, now that they were there on the front line where they would be bearing the brunt of the main attack

Gurtiev had great faith in his officers His young Chief of Staff Tarasov, did not know what tiredness was he could sit for days and nights in a dugout that was constantly being shaken by explosions, poring over maps, planning the complicated battle ahead His uncompromising judgment, his habit of looking life straight in the face and getting to the bottom of a situation to know the truth however bitter, were based on unflinching faith There was

unshakable strength of mind and spirit hidden in that thin youth with the face, speech and hands of a peasant The Colonel s political instructor Lieutenant Svirin was possessed of an iron will a sharp mind, and a tremendous capacity for self-denial He could remain calm cheerful and smiling, where even the calmest and most cheerful would lose their smile Markelov Mikhalyev and Chamov the regimental commanders, were the Colonel s pride and joy He had as much faith in them as in himself The whole Division spoke with love and admiration of Chamov s silent courage Markelov s grit, and the fine qualities of Mikhalyev, the darling of his regiment who was like a father to his subordinates a gentle, good-natured soul, and completely fearless Even so Colonel Gurtiev now looked anxiously at the faces of his regimental commanders, for he knew what bearing the brunt of the main attack meant, what it meant to hold the line in Stalingrad "Will they stand up to it? he wondered

Hardly had the division had time to entrench itself in the stony ground of Stalingrad, hardly had the command post moved into a deep gallery cut in the sandy escarpment above the Volga the communications lines been laid and the transmitters begun to tap out their messages to the artillery positions on the other side of the river, hardly had the first pale light of dawn pierced the darkness than the Germans opened fire For eight hours solid the German Junkers dive-bombed the Division s positions, for eight hours, without a moment s pause, wave after wave of German planes passed over, for eight hours the sirens wailed, the bombs whistled through the air, the earth trembled and what was left of the brick buildings crashed to the ground For eight hours the air was dark with smoke and dust and deadly splinters zipped everywhere Anyone who has heard the whine of the air rent by falling bomb anyone who has experienced an intense ten-minute bombing raid by the Luftwaffe will understand what eight hours of solid aerial bombardment by dive-bombers means For eight hours the Siberians kept up a constant barrage of fire at the enemy aircraft and the Germans doubtless felt something like despair as the whole area of the plant, burning and shrouded in a black cloud of dust and smoke, crackled with rifle shots, rattled with machine-gun fire, the short thuds of anti-tank rifles and the regular, angry fire of ack-ack guns It would seem that everything living must be broken, annihilated, yet there were the Siberian Division, dug into the ground, uncowed and unbroken, keeping up a continuous deadly barrage of fire The Germans had thrown in their heavy mortars and artillery The monotonous hiss of mines and the crash of shells merged

with the whine of sirens and the roar of exploding bombs So it continued until nightfall Then in solemn silence the Red Army men buried their dead comrades That was the first day, the house-warming The German mortar-batteries kept up their racket all night and few of the men got any sleep

That night at the command post, Colonel Gurtiev met two old friends he had not seen for over twenty years Men who had parted young bachelors now met again old and grey Two of them were divisional commanders, and the third commanded a tank brigade They embraced and all those present–the HQ chiefs, adjutants and majors of the operations staff–saw tears in the eyes of these grey-haired men

Would you believe it! Would you believe it! they exclaimed over and over And indeed there was something magnificent and extremely moving in this meeting between friends of youth at this grim hour, amid the burning factory buildings and the ruins of Stalingrad

The German artillery pounded away all night, and as soon as it was light forty dive-bombers appeared, and again the sirens wailed, again the black cloud of dust and smoke billowed high above the plant, shrouding the ground, the workshops, the wrecked railway wagons, and even the tall factory chimneys That morning Markelov s regiment emerged from the cover of their trenches dugouts and shelters, left their stone and concrete burrows and went into the attack They advanced over slag heaps and ruins, past the granite administrative building of the plant, over rails and across suburban allotments They went past thousands of jagged bomb craters, with the whole inferno of German air raids overhead A rain of iron lashed them from ahead, and still they went on And the enemy once again was seized by a superstitious fear were those really men advancing to the attack, were they mere mortals?

They were mortals alright Markelov s regiment advanced a thousand yards and occupied new positions, digging themselves in Only here in Stalingrad do people really know what a thousand yards is It means three thousand feet, thirty-six thousand inches At night the enemy attacked the regiment with greatly superior forces–German battalions of infantry advanced supported by heavy tanks, and a thick hail of machine-gun bullets showered down on the regiment s positions Drunken German soldiers pushed forward with the stubbornness of the insane The dead bodies of the soldiers, and their comrades who heard how throughout the night and the next day and again the next night Russian machine-guns rattled and Russian hand-grenades exploded will bear witness to

how Markelov s regiment fought The tale of this battle will be told by the burnt-out German tanks the long rows of crosses with German helmets on them marking the graves of platoons companies and battalions

They were indeed mere mortals, and none of them returned

The third day the German aircraft were in the air over the Division s positions not eight hours but twelve They were still up there after nightfall, and out of the high dark vault of the night sky came the wailing sirens of the Junkers, and the heavy frequent thuds of the bombs hammering the ground and exploding in a vast sheet of smoky, red flames The German guns and mortars showered shells and bombs on the Division from morning till night The Germans had a hundred artillery regiments in the Battle of Stalingrad Sometimes they would harass us with short bombardments, and at night-time they would keep up a steady systematic barrage that was a great nuisance They were supported by mortar batteries This was the line of the main attack!

Several times a day the German guns and mortars suddenly fell silent and the sky was suddenly empty of dive-bombers An uncanny silence descended Then the observers cried Action stations and the men in the forward lines grabbed their incendiary bottles at the ready, the anti-tank riflemen opened their ammunition bags the tommy-gunners wiped their guns on their palms, and the grenadiers moved their boxes of hand-grenades closer This short silence did not mean a pause It meant an attack was imminent

Soon the clank of caterpillar tracks and the low rumble of engines announced the approaching tanks, and the lieutenant shouted Get ready, comrades! Tommy-gunners coming through on the left flank!

Sometimes the Germans came as close as thirty or forty yards and the Siberians could see their grimy faces and torn greatcoats, and hear the guttural cries, threats, and jibes And after the Germans had been repulsed, the dive-bombers and the waves of gun and mortar fire pounded the Division with renewed fury

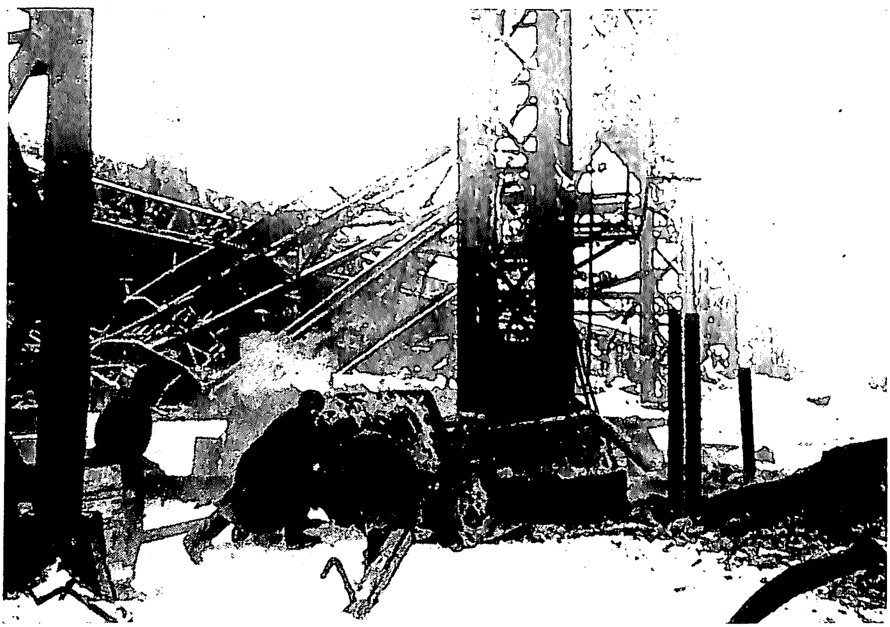
Our artillery played an invaluable role in repulsing the German attacks Fugenfirov, the commander of the artillery regiment and the battalion and battery commanders were up in front with the Siberian Division They were in direct radio contact with the firing positions, and the crews of dozens of powerful long-range guns across the Volga breathed as one with the infantry, sharing their every joy and sorrow, their every anxiety The artillery was invaluable in dozens of ways it covered the infantry positions with a solid shield of fire, mangled the German tanks as if they were made of cardboard, those heavy tanks that the anti-tank units were



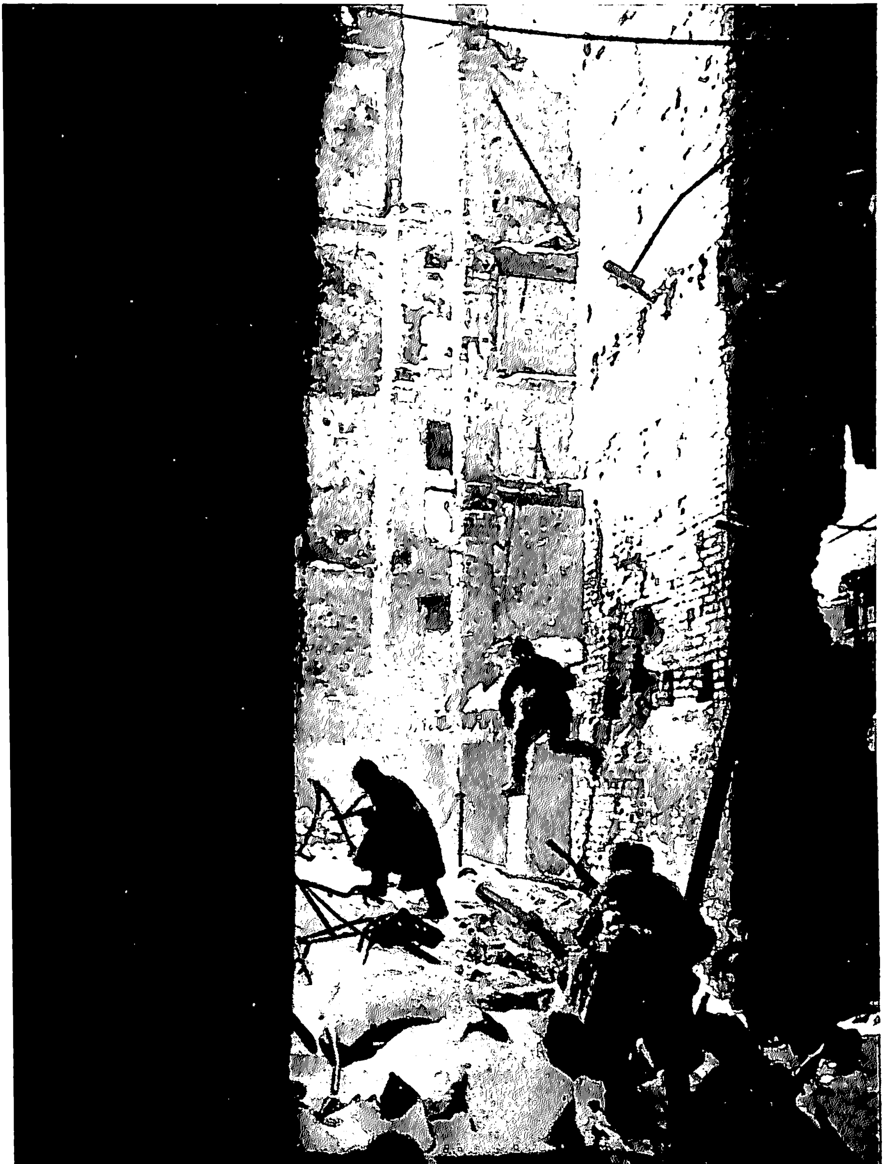
Stalingrad, 1942

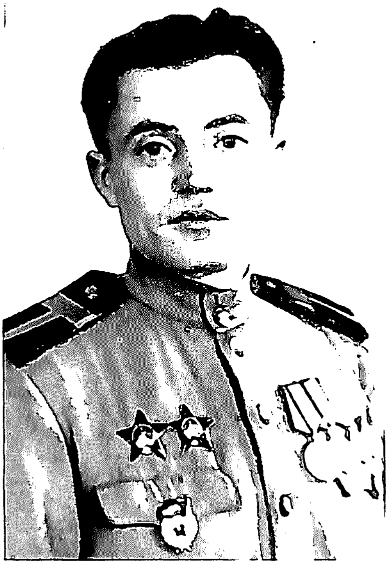


General Vassily Chuikov of the 62nd
Army at his command post

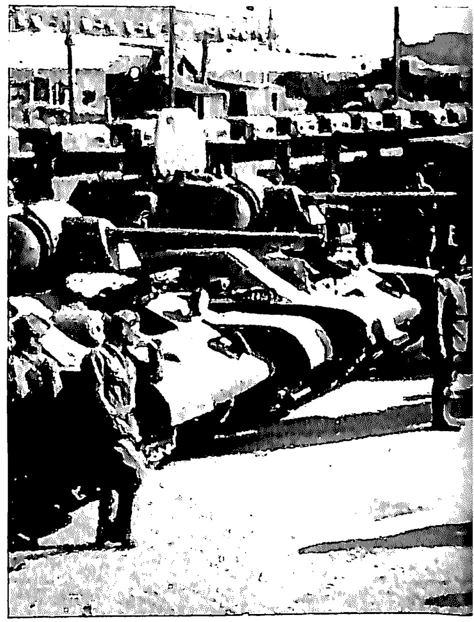


House-to-house fighting





Hero of the Soviet Union Sergeant Pavlov who with his small unit defended a single house (now a memorial) for fifty-eight days preventing the Germans from breaking through to the Volga







Fresh tanks arriving



Still time for a cuppa



General Alexander Rodimtsev whose 13th Guards Division defended the central district



The Volga ablaze





Before common grave



Joyous meeting. Units which have routed von Paulus's armies to the west of Stalingrad link up with heroic defenders of the city, 9:20, Jan. 31, 1943

unable to deal with, mowed down the tommy-gunners advancing under cover of the tanks, pounded now a square now an enemy troop concentrations, blowing up ammunition dumps and sending mortar batteries sky-high At no other time in the course of the war had the infantry felt such friendly support from the artillery as at Stalingrad

In the course of a month the enemy launched one hundred and seventeen attacks against the Siberian Division

There was one terrible day when the German tanks and infantry attacked twenty-three times And all twenty-three attacks were repulsed Every day except three for a month the Luftwaffe was in the air over the Division s positions for ten to twelve hours–three hundred and twenty hours in the whole month The operations department counted up the astronomical number of bombs dropped on the Division It ran into tens of thousands, so did the number of Luftwaffe sorties All this on a front little over a mile long! The roar of explosions was enough to deafen the whole of mankind, the fire and metal was enough to wipe a whole country off the map The Germans thought they were breaking the morale of the Siberians They thought they had exceeded the limits of human endurance, the power of human hearts and nerves to stand up to such punishment But, amazingly, the men had not crumpled had not gone insane had not lost control of their hearts and nerves, but had instead become stronger and calmer The sturdy, tight-lipped Siberians had become even sterner, even more tight-lipped their cheeks had become hollow, and their eyes more determined Here where the brunt of the German attack was borne there was no singing, no accordions, no light conversation in the short lulls in the fighting Here men were undergoing a super-human strain There were times when no one slept for three or four days and nights, and talking with his men Gurtiev was pained to hear a soldier say quietly

We ve got everything Comrade Colonel, nine hundred grammes of bread, and hot meals in thermoses twice a day without fail–but we re just not hungry

Gurtiev loved and respected his men, and he knew that when a soldier is not hungry , he s really finding the going hard But now Gurtiev s mind was at ease He realised that there was no power on earth that could shake his Siberians The soldiers and their officers had learned a lot from their bitter experience in battle Their defence had become even better and firmer There was now a vast defence system in front of the factory workshops–dugouts, communication trenches and firing-points, the engineers

had taken the defence works well forward in front of the plant The troops had learned to manoeuvre underground in a quick organised manner, to concentrate and disperse, pass from the workshops to the forward trenches via the communication trenches or vice versa, depending on where the Luftwaffe was attacking, depending on from which quarter the German tanks and infantry were advancing Underground feelers were dug along which men could reach the heavy German tanks standing only a hundred yards from the workshops The engineers mined all the approaches to the plant They had to carry the mines in their hands, two at a time, holding them under their arm-pits like loaves of bread The route from the river bank to the plant twisted for four or five miles and was constantly under enemy fire Mining had to be carried out in pitch darkness, before the dawn, often within as little as a hundred feet of the nazi positions In this manner some two thousand mines were planted under the scattered timbers of wooden houses destroyed by the bombing, under piles of stones, and in bomb and shell craters The men had learned to defend big buildings by keeping up a solid curtain of fire from the ground to the fifth floor, to build remarkably well-camouflaged observation posts right under the Germans noses, to make good use of large bomb craters and the whole complex system of gas, oil and water mains beneath the plant Radio contact between the artillery and the infantry was improving daily and it sometimes seemed as if they were no longer separated by the Volga, as if the accurate guns, which instantly reacted to every movement by the enemy, were right there alongside the troops and the command posts

The men s moral fibre had grown along with their experience They themselves could not feel, did not understand, could not sense the psychological changes that had taken place in them during their month in hell, on the front line of the great defence of Stalingrad They thought they were the same as they had always been In the short lulls they would wash in the underground bath-chambers, eat the hot food brought them in thermoses, and Makarevich and Karnaukhov, with their great growth of beard, like peacetime village postmen, came under fire to the forward lines with their leather bags, carrying newspapers and letters from far-off Siberian villages The men remembered their peacetime village jobs as carpenters, smiths or farmers They jokingly referred to the German six-barrel mortar as 'goofy and the dive-bombers with their sirens as "fiddlers or "musicians In reply to the threatening cries of the German tommy-gunners from nearby ruins "*Hei, Russ, bul-bul, sdavaisa!*" (Surrender or you'll be blowing bubbles—i e,

in the Volga), they laughed and said cheerfully to one another How come the Germans don t want to drink out of the Volga? Or are they satisfied with putrid water? They thought they were the same people as before and only the new arrivals from across the river looked with amazement at these men who knew no fear for whom the words life ' and 'death' no longer existed Only an outsider could appreciate the iron strength of the Siberians, their calm determination to bear their heavy lot to the end

Heroism had become a part of everyday life, of the very manner of these men it had become a prosaic, mundane habit Heroism was present at all times and in everything There was heroism in the work of the cooks, peeling potatoes while incendiary shells exploded all around There was great heroism in the work of the young nurses, the schoolgirls from Tobolsk, who went on bandaging the wounded, and giving them water to drink in the heat of the battle Yes, to the outsider s eyes there was heroism in every little movement the men of the Division made in the way the commander of the communications platoon Khamitsky sat calmly in a mound in front of the dugout reading belles-lettres, while the German dive-bombers swooped around, in the way communications officer Batrakov carefully wiped his spectacles, put reports into his field-bag and set off for seven and a half miles through the ' Ravine of Death with perfectly normal calm, as if he were out for a Sunday morning stroll, in the way the tommy-gunner Kolosov, buried up to the neck in earth and splintered boards after an explosion in the dugout, smiled at the deputy commander of the Division, Svirin in the way the HQ typist, a robust, red-cheeked Siberian woman, Klava Kopylova, began to type a combat order in one dugout, was buried and dug out, went to type on in another, was again buried and dug out, and still finished her typing in a third dugout and took it to the divisional commander to be signed

These were the kind of people that stood in the line of the main attack

The Germans know better than anyone how stubbornly they resisted One night a prisoner was brought to Svirin in his dugout His hands, and his grey-stubbled face were caked with grime, and the woollen scarf round his neck was like a filthy floorcloth He served in a special Iron Guard unit, had fought in all the campaigns and was a member of the nazi party After the routine interrogation, Svirin asked What is the Germans' opinion of the resistance in the area of the Plant? The question was translated for the prisoner, who stood leaning back against the stone wall of the dugout He was lost for words and burst into tears

Yes, these were real men who bore the brunt of the main attack and their hearts and nerves did not fail them

After almost twenty days the Germans launched a decisive attack on the plant Never in history had an assault been preceded by such massive preparation The Luftwaffe and the heavy mortars and artillery showered the Division with bombs and shells for eighty hours solid three days and nights that were a chaos of smoke, fire and thunder The whistle of falling bombs the scream of mortar shells from the six-barrel goofies the thunder of heavy shells and the protracted wail of the sirens was alone enough to deafen people–but they were only the prelude to the thunder of explosions Jagged tongues of flame spurted up and the air was rent by the howl of tormented metal For eighty hours it went on, then the preparation finished suddenly at five in the morning and immediately German tanks and infantry advanced to the attack The Germans managed to penetrate into the plant workshops their tanks roared at its very walls, they broke through our defences and cut off the command posts from the forward lines It would have seemed that deprived of their commanders further resistance by the troops would have been impossible and that the command posts, under direct enemy attack, would be wiped out But an extraordinary thing happened every trench every dugout every firing-point and every fortified ruin became a separate, isolated fortress with its own command, its own communications Sergeants and rank-and-file soldiers assumed command, and skilfully repulsed all attacks And in this bitter, critical hour the commanders and HQ staff turned the command posts into fortified strong-points, and fought like rank-and-file soldiers to repulse the enemy attacks Chamov beat off ten attacks A giant, red-haired tank commander defending Chamov s command post used up all his grenades and ammunition and then took to hurling stones at the advancing Germans Chamov himself manned a mortar The golden boy of the Division, Mikhalyev, was killed by a direct bomb hit on the command post They ve killed our father, said the men Major Kushnaryov, who replaced Mikhalyev, transferred his command post to a concrete pipe that passed beneath the workshops Along with his Chief-of-Staff, Dyatlenko, and six other staff officers he successfully defended the entrance to the pipe for several hours with a few boxes of grenades, repulsing numerous German attacks

This battle, unequalled in its cruelty and ferocity lasted for several days and nights uninterrupted It was fought for every step of a staircase, for every corner in a dark passage, for every

machine and the space between them, for every gas pipe No one took a step back in this battle And if the Germans gained some ground it meant that there was nobody left alive to defend it Everyone fought like the giant red-haired tankman, whose name Chamov was never to learn like the sapper Kosichenko, who, his left arm broken took to removing the pin of his grenades with his teeth It was as if the fallen were giving added strength to the living and there were moments when ten men held a line that had been defended by a whole battalion The workshops changed hands many times in the course of the battle The Germans succeeded in occupying several buildings and workshops It was in this battle that the German offensive reached its climax This was the high-water mark of their main attack As if they had lifted a weight that was too heavy for them they overstrained some inner spring that had set their battering-ram in motion

The German onslaught began to falter They had three divisions the 94th the 305th and the 389th, fighting the Siberians Their hundred and seventeen infantry attacks cost 5 000 German lives The Siberians withstood this superhuman pressure Two thousand tons of scrap metal from enemy tanks littered the ground in front of the plant Thousands of tons of bombs, mines and shells had fallen on the factory yard and on the workshops, but still the Division held out The troops faced death, without ever once looking back, for they knew that behind them lay the Volga and the fate of Russia

One cannot help wondering how this tremendous strength was forged It was partly the national character, the tremendous sense of responsibility and that stolid Siberian stubbornness, excellent military and political training and strict discipline But there was something else I should like to mention as having played no mean role in this great, tragic epic–and that was the amazingly fine morale and the strong bond of love that united all the men of the Siberian Division A spirit of Spartan simplicity was characteristic of the whole staff It was reflected in ordinary, everyday details, in the refusal to accept the rationed hundred grammes of vodka that was theirs by right throughout the whole long Stalingrad battle, and in their sensible calm, business-like manner I saw the love that united the men of the Division, in the deep distress with which they mourned the loss of their fallen comrades

I saw it in the moving meeting between the grey-haired Colonel Gurtiev and the battalion nurse, Zoya Kalganova, when she returned to duty after her second wound Hello, my dear child, Gurtiev said quietly, and quickly went forward with outstretched

hands to greet the thin girl with close-cropped hair—just like a father greeting his own daughter

This love and faith in one another was what helped the soldiers in the heat of battle to take the place of their commander and the commanders and staff to take up machine-guns, hand-grenades, and incendiary bottles to repulse the German tanks approaching the command post

The wives and children of these men will never forget their husbands and fathers who fell in the great battle on the Volga They cannot be forgotten, these fine, true men There is only one worthy way in which our Red Army can honour the sacred memory of the men who bore the brunt of the enemy's main attack—and that is by an unlimited, liberating offensive We believe that the hour of this offensive is at hand

Vassily Roslyakov

When the German invasion came Vassily Ros lyakov–then an 18 year old student of the Moscow Institute of Philosophy Literature and History–joined up as a volunteer and fought right through the war It was not until 25 years later when he was already a well known literary critic that he wrote about those days in his story called One of Us which tells a poetic tale of the students of his old Alma Mater who went to war against the nazi invaders

The present collection includes excerpts from this story

ONE OF US

It was a dreadful day, that Sunday It was the last day of peace On the face of it the streets the shops, the Metro, the trams the sun–everything in Moscow looked the same as ever But only on the face of it for it was the first day of war and everything was swiftly going over to a wartime footing both the city and its people

The student hostel was to be turned into a hospital and we were moved out into various school buildings

We worked at a factory, digging foundation pits for new workshops We worked twelve hours a day, but our minds were not so much on the job as on the war communiques We measured time from one communique to another, expecting to be called up at any moment At night we did fire-watch on the roof of the school building

The air raids intensified Once when we were on our way home from work the sirens began wailing before we could reach our side-street Suddenly something whammed behind us and we all dropped to the cobbles I thought I was done for, but it was alright Yes, I thought then, it is time I went to the front

There weren t enough beds in the school and, when not on duty in the attic, we slept on the floor In one corner Yudin and Maryana shared a mattress sleeping together like husband and wife Before we would have been shocked, but now it seemed perfectly all right, and we even liked it

That same night when I had thought I was done for Kolya came over to me and began whispering in my ear

They must ve forgotten about us at the recruiting centre he whispered The army s retreating while we sit here digging pits

That's something others can do; it can be left to women. Let's go to the recruiting centre and find out."

Kolya had grown thin and his face looked longer; the down on his upper lip had almost grown into a moustache. And Natasha wasn't in Moscow. She was somewhere digging anti-tank ditches.

When she was leaving Natasha had run in to say good-bye to Kolya. She was wearing a white blouse and skiing slacks and had a knapsack on her back. She had lost all inhibitions and cried and kissed Kolya so hard that I felt embarrassed and went out into the corridor.

I talked to Vitya, and the next morning after the night shift, we all went to the recruiting centre–all, that is, except for Lyova Drozd, who we'd let go home because he wasn't feeling well.

The recruiting centre was crowded out. We had to wait almost half the day, but we finally got to see the chief. Instead of greeting us or at least offering us a seat, he started bawling:

"I'm sick and tired of saying the same thing over and over again!" he shouted, waving his arms. "Is there no order, damn it?!"

But we were already standing right by his desk and Vitya was butting in in a wheedling voice, I'd never heard him use it before. He kept repeating two words over and over again, over and over again: "Comrade Colonel! Comrade Colonel!"

"Well, what is it, Comrade Lastochkin?" the colonel suddenly said amicably. We looked at one another: so he knew Lastochkin. "I've said it a hundred times and I'll say it again: I haven't the rights!" He spread his arms and sat down heavily in his armchair. He looked at us, and a flicker of recognition lit up his face. "Ah, here's another acquaintance," he said, nodding at Yudin. "Yudin, if I'm not mistaken?"

Yudin riveted his eyes to the floor and a flush slowly crept over his face. The colonel suddenly threw up his arms and groaned: "Ye gods! What am I to do with the lot of you? Sit down."

We sat down. The colonel calmed down completely and said that, Lastochkin being a veteran of the Finnish War, he'd find some army job for him. As for Yudin, there was nothing he could do: he was deferred on medical grounds, and that was final. The others–that is, Kolya and me–would be called up in due course.

"And don't imagine that the war'll be over by evening," he said in conclusion. "There'll be enough and more left over for you. Now let me get on with my work. Good-bye."

Out in the corridor Yudin said moodily, "They'll take me

anyway I can see practically everything' He covered his left eye, the one with the small opaque spot on it, with his hand

Perhaps he s only kidding us," Vitya said wistfully "But why pick at things when there s a war on?

Several days later Vitya was summoned to the recruiting centre and received a military assignment he was to head a school for medical nurses With a heavy heart he agreed, packed up and went to the village outside Moscow where the school was located We were one less

We continued to wait for call-up For Yudin it was useless to wait, so he was busy acting acting, silently and secretively, as always At night he worked, and in the daytime he made rounds of places unknown One day he returned in a state of joyous excitement

I ve been enlisted, he informed us, "in an airborne unit" But his joy was short-lived, and he was again deferred However, it was evidently with good reason that we considered him the cleverest and best-read of us In the classroom where we slept on the floor there appeared the eye-test cards used in the recruitment medical board Where had he got them? Probably simply swiped them Yudin pinned the cards to the blackboard and began training He walked back the required distance and asked one of us–usually Maryana–to point with a pencil to one of the letters or little figures Yudin had to name the letter or figure At first he was almost always wrong, but his guessing got better and better until he knew the tables by heart In this way he managed to fool the next medical commission and was enrolled in a special Air Observation, Warning and Communications unit

Yudin was issued a Red Army uniform, which included an outsized tunic, forage cap and boots with black puttees He was happy, dashing and slightly ridiculous Maryana inspected him, turning him this way and that and exclaiming "Doesn't he look fine boys? Only the cap s a bit small Make sure you change it, Tolya, do you hear me?

We bid Yudin a hearty farewell His unit was stationed somewhere near Moscow and Maryana could visit him there

A week later, in the beginning of August, a whole bunch of us, including Kolya, Lyova Drozd and myself, received our call-up papers Drozd was to go to an artillery officer school, Kolya and myself to an infantry school

We arrived at the station with two hours to go before the train was due to leave It seemed like an eternity Maryana came to see

us off We loitered on the platform trying to make conversation but we were probably all thinking the same thing what our army service held in store for us For although still in the civilian jackets, we were already soldiers

One sturdy, swarthy lad walked over to the head of our group with his girl-friend and asked for leave of absence for half an hour

We re going to the registry office he said It s not far just round the corner

And they ran off holding hands to get married

Fools I said

Why fools? Maryana inquired defensively

What if something happens? Suppose he gets killed? She ll be left a widow

Don t talk nonsense

But he *can* get killed, can t he?

Stop it As if there were nothing better to talk about

I stopped and apologised to Maryana for my stupid words But Kolya suddenly continued on the same subject

I d get married like that too, he said Don t you see? It s one thing to fight just like that, but it s another thing to fight as a husband You ve got your Natasha, your wife as well as your country behind you I ll get married just as soon as I get the chance

'You re right,' I said and thought to myself What will happen to us?

For the first time in my life I wanted to know my future if only for a day ahead, or two days or better still a whole month

The newly-weds turned up just in time for the train–and with no time to say good-bye properly They were both flushed and glowing with happiness Only when the train started and the husband began to wave his cap did the wife break down She ran a little way after the coach, then halted and burst into tears Maryana called out to us

See that you write!

We looked out of the windows for some time before settling down for the journey The lads were a merry bunch, with endless jokes and banter including a few digs at the newly-hatched husband, not offensive but good, friendly fun We quickly made friends all round

Some one struck up a marching song But I felt like talking, talking to anybody so as not to be alone with my thoughts

How long did the Paris Commune hold out? I asked Kolya

I didn t know myself why I asked such a foolish question Kolya turned and stared at me as if I were insane

Wh-a-t?

No seriously How long did the Paris Commune hold out?

He replied in his other voice, a little gruffly and angrily 'It s still holding out

I didn t want to continue this silly conversation, but I couldn t help it something was goading me on

Kolya, but what if our days are numbered too? And some day people will recall our life like some radiant dream of mankind Eh?

Kolya s eyes glinted hostilely

Know what? he said It won t ever happen We re going to beat them all the same

I also thought we d beat them, but something seemed to drive me to look over the edge of the abyss Suppose the Germans occupied the whole country, even Siberia what then? If any one of us remained alive we d make ourselves die We d all die Even in my damn-fool imagination there was no place for a life of servitude

Don t get me wrong, Kolya, I said We ll lick them alright, I know I just sort of turned into a mealy intellectual for a moment

Lenin was an intellectual Kolya retorted You ve simply gone mealy Come on, let s sing

We joined the singing

Late that night, when we turned in–we had second-deck bunks opposite each other–Kolya and I softly sang our favourite song, Transvaal, Transvaal, my land, you are all in flames A very fine song

For several days the sky had been overcast and discharged still warm but fine and monotonous rain Alarms became more frequent at the camp Somewhere in the distance artillery blasts rent the air and ack-ack guns chattered nervously At such times we sat crouching in water-logged trenches

However, we got used to the night raids on Luzhki We opened fire with our rifles and our Degtyaryov training machine-gun–whenever it was in order Three times a day, we marched singing along the road to the mess and back This was the road we liked best of all at the camp, because to tell the truth, every moment of the day even after meals, we felt hungry

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The author and his friend were assigned to the Podolsk Infantry Officer School in the village of Luzhki –*Ed*

One day, a Sunday Natasha came Kolya had been expecting a letter from her, but instead she appeared in person How on earth had she managed to find us with only the coded APO number? Kolya didn t ask her, and he was right Natasha would have tracked Kolya down even if we d been sent to some non-existent town And this was only Luzhki, so close at hand When Kolya was informed of her arrival the two of us went to ask for a leave of absence

We wound up before a colonel It was all one to us as we had no idea who our top brass were

Kolya stood to attention, saluted smartly and requested permission to speak

The colonel was not at all impressed by his brilliant performance He paused, then said calmly, Not granted, and sternly inquired why we were not dressed properly

We exchanged baffled glances, then looked each other over and I noticed something I d seen before but never paid attention to there was a button missing on the pocket flap of Kolya s tunic Kolya carried a fat notebook in his pocket and it had buttoned with difficulty, until at last the button had burst off altogether I nodded at the pocket, and the colonel said

Do you think you can walk about without buttons and with your pockets stuffed with rubbish?

Incidentally, in spite of the bulging pocket and the missing button, Kolya looked smart and even elegant Still, the colonel probably knew best

The colonel took his peaked cap off the nail it was hanging on, extracted a threaded needle from the lining rummaged in his desk for a button and asked Kolya to empty the pocket Not without difficulty Kolya extricated the notebook together with a stub of pencil and laid them on the desk The colonel deftly sewed the button on, nipped the thread with his teeth, buttoned the pocket and patted it down

Well, how s that?

Kolya fingered the button said it was fine, and thanked him

Not at all, the colonel replied and asked what our request was Kolya clicked his heels, raised his hand smartly to the lacquered peak of his cap and stated our request The colonel filled out a pass

"And find another place for that,' he said, nodding at the notebook

He picked it up, turned it over and leafed through it He stopped at one page and read aloud

The guilty sky
Was lashed by forks of lightning

Kolya blushed The lines were from a still unwritten poem and he felt embarrassed at them being read out loud, as though someone was peering into his soul The colonel flipped over another page and read out again

The flame of thought that never abased itself with idleness ' "

The colonel had the rugged face of a military man, but Kolya s notes evidently moved him in a non-military way He murmured Well-said, and pondered over the phrase for a moment, then asked whom the words referred to

Barbusse, Kolya replied

Well said, the colonel repeated, and turned over another page A Soviet man has no right to be an ignoramus, a fool, in general a lowly person Because forever before him stand Lenin and the Revolution Whose words are those? '

Kolya said nothing

I see Your own The colonel mused for a moment, then closed the notebook and walked up to Kolya 'You know what? When the button comes off again sew it on a little higher and it won t be such a tight fit He stuffed the notebook back into the tunic pocket

If you re a plain cadet and a colonel sews a button on your tunic and with his own hand sticks your notebook back into the left pocket, that colonel must be worth something At the very least he clearly felt that Lenin and the Revolution did stand before us

We had even forgotten about Natasha for a moment, but then we dashed to the gate A fine, light drizzle was falling, making the air like whitish gauze through which we saw Natasha standing on a pine-clad slope embracing a copper coloured trunk On recognising Kolya in one of us, she ripped off her raincoat hood and tore down the slope She stopped a few steps away in order to take a good look at the new Kolya Terentyev standing before her I shall never forget her eyes as long as I live After seeing them I can now always tell the difference between true and phony love Kolya also stopped for a moment Then they rushed into each other s arms I walked on up the hill into the pine woods But soon Natasha called me over She stepped back from Kolya, looked at him and said, 'Tolya Yudin's been killed In an air raid, and sadly lowered her happy eyes

We stared at the sandy ground covered with last year s pine needles and cones Even though there was a war on I couldn t imagine Tolya Yudin dead Yudin His shy smile, the shock

of hair forever slipping down over one eye his cryptic expression his old books, the letters from his musician brother himself—breathing into his cupped hand high temperature again! Could it really be? Could it really be that none of this would ever be again?

We walked gloomily up the hill We asked about Maryana Natasha said she had enlisted in Tolya s unit

As October drew to a close it got colder and colder One day after lunch when we were resting in the tents battle alarm was sounded We raced to the parade ground falling in hastily and asking each other and the section commanders What s the matter, what s happened? Are the Germans coming? We were told it was nothing serious, that the school as a unit was going on a practice forced march—first on foot, then entrained, then again on foot We were given five minutes to assume complete combat readiness, check arms and go through the tents to see that no odds and ends were left behind

Even with the parade ground filled with men the camp sodden from the drizzling rains, seemed empty, deserted We stood there in full battle dress with sheathed trench shovels knapsacks and arms I had a light machine-gun on my shoulder Kolya carried two boxes with empty magazines

The commander of our 4th Company, a small, alert man in an olive-green cape, with a submachine-gun slung across his chest, trotted to the head of the column His shrill voice rang out, and the Company moved forward in the wake of Companies One Two, Three, in the wake of the other companies of the other battalions

Soon the wet camp dripping tears of fine rain was behind us The still green grasses and wild plants shimmered along the roadside gathering water until it spilled over causing them to shudder forlornly As we marched on in our grey greatcoats we seemed to be thinking of nothing but Left, left, left The road was sandy and it was like walking on dry ground left, left, left

We didn t take long to reach Serpukhov, though Kolya and I had to swap loads several times on the way Carrying a machine-gun and magazines is no joke Back in camp some had envied us Now we envied them, they had it so easy with their toy rifles on their backs

It was quite dark when we entrained We chugged off Forced march? The worst thing in war is when you don t know what s happening and where you re heading for

The train stopped Dim lanterns swayed in someone s hands We piled out onto the platform Some said it was Podolsk Someone

went somewhere, came back, called to someone Wooden crates smelling of pine were lugged up to the wagons We pried them open with bayonets They contained zinc boxes Cartridges! Kolya and I had a crate to ourselves We ripped open the zinc things with a bayonet Cold, heavy, sharp-beaked cartridges We were no longer kids but the sight of so many death-dealing cartridges was disturbing Even to the touch, in the darkness, they were impressive There would seem to be nothing much in a live cartridge–yet there is A human life perhaps or death

With these strange feelings we stuffed our pouches and even our greatcoat pockets full of cold, heavy cartridges We took one zinc box into the goods van to fill the empty magazines Meanwhile a rumour began to spread that the Germans had breached the front at Moscow But by now we realised that we were bound for the front The realisation made us feel–well, not exactly better, but somehow calmer, not worried anymore At such moments all you want is the truth It doesn t matter whether it is good or bad, you just feel better to know it It s when you re completely in the dark that worry gnaws you

The dawn was wet and rainy The troop train emerged from its nocturnal wanderings at Maloyaroslavets The town looked sullen We marched in columns past its sodden wooden houses without disturbing their alert somnolence The black road, its mud surface kneaded by thousands of feet, crept away towards the distant woods looking vaguely beyond the gloomy shroud of rain The low-hanging sky with churned-up miry clouds poured lazily down on us without respite At times the rain bucked up and acquired a summer rustle, only to subside exhausted and pour hopelessly on our darkened columns The greatcoat was sodden and uncomfortable, the stiff wet collar rubbed the neck Thousands of feet slogged wearily along the muddy road The world seemed cooped-up and hopeless Yet column after column we crawled on, forging ahead, on and on

Kolya was marching in the row of four ahead of me and I could see his shoulders sagging from the heavy boxes with the magazines The only reminder of yesterday s smart cadet was the soaking-wet service cap bobbing over the rough greatcoat collar with the skinny neck sticking out of it

I called out to him I wanted to see his face to reassure myself, and perhaps him too

He slowly turned his head and winked tiredly at me over one shoulder Alive, though not exactly kicking I shifted the machine-gun in its canvas cover to the other shoulder, and although I hadn t

really had time to rest yet my stride became a bit firmer and more confident Fresh strength seemed to swell up from nowhere You d have thought there was none left, you were dragging your feet one after the other like a robot, but then you exchanged a glance with someone and another drop of patience and strength appeared as if by a miracle You craned your neck somewhere way up in front in the wet haze Company One must be marching Heads bobbed wearily, feet dragged heavily But I knew that the column was not just marching it was thinking too What does the country need most now? I thought March and march ahead, into the grey rainy mist One day, two days, three days, as long as necessary And I marched and Kolya in front of me, and my comrades marched on

Fix bayonets! the order was passed down the ranks, and a palisade of sabre bayonets rose above the column Shoulders squared, heads lifted a bit higher We marched on thinking The cold forest of bayonets swayed rhythmically A grove of young aspen trees crept up to the road Behind them dark firs loomed sombrely A halt was called

What is happiness? Today I would ponder before answering But then I would have said unhesitatingly happiness is when the company commander has ordered a halt and the sergeant issues you a chunk of black bread and a spoonful of condensed milk

Imperceptibly the day had turned into murky twilight We sat on the wet leaves of the year before, holding pieces of stale, cold bread with condensed milk poured over them, nibbling carefully at the edges so as not to drop any crumbs crunching into this titbit for fighting men What a pleasure it is after to deeply inhale the sweetish smoke of the rationed tobacco Kolya rolled a cigarette and said

When the war s over I ll spend my whole grant on condensed milk Forty-four tins of it I ll eat twenty-two immediately and stretch out the other twenty-two to the next pay-day

No another cadet said I wouldn t buy condensed milk I d buy

He didn t finish We were ordered to finish our meal and led away in groups to dig trenches in an aspen grove The tree roots sprawled everywhere and had to be chopped through with spades It was hard work digging trenches in the woods And harder still to grasp the need for it Was this the front line already? We worked on our knees with our small shovels, worked away furiously until the order was given to fall in We did so and marched on It was all quite bewildering

The rain gradually turned into snow, the first snow of the year It swirled heavily overhead

It was pitch dark Black forest hemmed in the road on both sides black road black sky–even the white snow seemed black Swirling before unseeing eyes, the flakes settle on eye-lashes, melt and trickle down the face Their swirling makes the darkness writhe, and the head spin But we march on, on into the depth of the night

The news was whispered down the ranks fifty miles to the front Then more news not fifty but thirty An hour later the enemy has broken through and is advancing this way, he is a mere ten miles away Yet a halt was called, and we dropped down onto the soft mounds of snow between the trees Smoking was forbidden, and we didn t feel like it anyway Then again we were advancing through the black night towards the enemy What was he, curse him, thinking of on such a night?

On that night I discovered that when a man s dead tired he can walk on indefinitely, all his life Only once did we come to a halt, buckling up somehow, and an invisible flame of alarm flickering up Someone up in front had fallen asleep on the march, or simply stumbled and fallen But as he fell the man in front had turned to see what the matter was and had got struck in the eye with a bayonet The mishap was discussed in fearful whispers We were ordered to unfix bayonets, and the column moved on

Morning spread reluctantly beneath the ragged sky It found us on a deserted farm hemmed in on all sides by the forest where our headquarter services were busy setting up house Thick smoke belched from the chimney atop a hut, and intoxicating smells of cooking rose over the farm

The battalions that had arrived earlier were fed and dispatched to the front line After lunch our company marched off in platoon formation Less than two miles away, along a forest path, our First Platoon was ordered to entrench This was the second defence line

As we dug trenches we thought of our comrades approaching the forward line or already there They seemed much older than us, older even than themselves as they really were They seemed to have acquired something the most important and significant thing that a man can acquire in his lifetime

The road to war ended at this clearing, at these trenches–incongruous black slashes through the still green grass, beneath white

birch trees slashed by the winds and rains of the first wartime autumn

Dusk huddled amidst the ancient fir-trees Closer to the edge among the birches it was light even on this grey damp morning

We stood in our trenches, heads sticking slightly above the brand-new breastwork We were there at last, chest-deep in the ground and our jumbled thoughts began to seek a foothold to gain stability Take root in this earth this is your line, your fortress your home and country Every man s in his trench

Living creatures in shallow foxholes along the forest edge a man to a hole And each hole is also a home and a fortress one s Country No, it would not be so easy to force the fellows in blue cadet caps from these holes But what about those who had been retreating farther and farther back since the first days relinquishing foot after foot of their living land to the enemy? How hard it must be to retreat with the burden of home fortress and Country

I tried to explain these thoughts to Kolya Our machine-gun clung to the ground with its steel paws its little black muzzle sticking out over the breastwork Kolya and I leaned on the ledge of our roomy two-man foxhole, looking out in the same direction as the machine-gun s little black muzzle It was raining Kolya listened in silence as I expounded my ideas They seemed correct on the whole, but rather sad Why was that? Because according to the calendar of nature this was the month of farewell with native parts I couldn t hear the cranes honking overhead as they winged their way to distant foreign lands, but I knew they were at that very moment flying up there, invisible behind the veil of drizzly mist

On the other side of the clearing towards which the rifle barrels and the muzzle of our machine-gun were trained, a rowan tree dripped blood and the last daisies lifted their heads here and there in the wet grass Closer just beyond the breastwork, a purplish bluebell lay prone, felled by rain and snow but still alive and pure The leaves of rose-bay were a dark brick-red, and the bare heads of dandelions, with wet clinging pleats of what had once been merry snow-white fluff, shuddered in the wind

An autumn quiet enveloped the land Almost exactly in the middle of the clearing stood an old maple Brown leaves floated down from its twiggy crown They fell slowly seeking a cosy place in the grass A tomtit whistled barely audibly

Falling leaves, the bluebell prone in the grass, the timid whistling of the tomtit, the drizzling rain, the cold drops dripping to the ground from the machine-gun's little black muzzle Autumn That

was why I expounded my sad, albeit correct thoughts to Kolya Of course it was also because the war had been going on for several months and our soldiers were retreating, still retreating

The platoon commander made a round of the trenches to see if the breastwork was well turfed and how the cadets were feeling Then he ordered us to check our weapons and the first sporadic fitful shots rang out Bluish powder smoke rose over the trenches The lieutenant shoved Kolya and me apart and stood behind the machine-gun He fired a burst The shots reverberated in the chest Another burst, and they reverberated again Kolya and I also fired several rounds The bullets clipped leaves and twigs off trees on the other side of the clearing where the Germans were apparently expected to appear After the shooting-in we were finally convinced that they would in fact appear We peered into the thinned thickets and waited But they didn t appear

For the rest of the day and then on through the night bursts of firing kept breaking out to the left and the right of us and somewhere far out in front Machine-guns chattered in different voices, some muffled, some clearer A sudden silence would descend to be broken a few moments later Again a machine-gun chattered and sputtered and the heavy rumble of distant artillery reached us Real fighting was apparently going on over there

Before dusk a single cadet stumbled into the clearing We felt at once that he came from over there, where the guns were spitting He was dirty, crumpled, and looking about fearfully, the whites of his inflamed eyes rolling He started when we called out to him and responded hoarsely

Friend!

We surrounded him and he looked at us silently then suddenly started gushing He talked and talked and talked, stumbling over the words non-stop, afraid we wouldn t believe him

They ve all been killed there, to the last man, he gabbled The whole battalion I m the only one left The only one from a whole battalion Don t you believe me?

A clear case of panic one of the cadets said

Me–panic? Me? the friend bared his teeth in a poor attempt at challenge I m the only one left from the whole battalion Understand? It s hell out there You don t believe me? When you get out there you ll see

For several minutes the lieutenant listened in silence with knitted brows

Where s your rifle? he asked

I m telling you

Where s your rifle?

What rifle? I m the only one left from the whole battalion

Cadet the platoon commander looked among us and named one of the cadets Conduct him to headquarters Report to the chief of staff that on my orders you have delivered a coward and panic-monger Carry out orders!

Orders are to deliver the coward and panic-monger the cadet said sullenly without averting a heavy gaze from the friend s leaden gaze Then as sullenly he said Come on buddy get going and tilted his rifle

Of course he was a panic-monger And a coward That was clear to all But we looked on him as a man who had been *there* We felt gloomy and depressed Perhaps he *had* exaggerated and lied in his fright But his hunted look also told us of things we did not yet know and could not imagine But he knew Something was wrong there, things were not as they should be And the soul longed to be there, rather than languishing in uncertainty

' Well, what do *you* say? I asked Kolya when we got back to our trench

Don t worry *I* won t run Kolya said

That s not what I mean

But it s what *I* mean Kolya said stubbornly and looked me squarely in the eye As though continuing a conversation with himself he said The main thing is to stand firm We ve got to stand firm because we re retreating and we just can t go on retreating

At night a cold wind sprang up and scattered the clouds It shook drops from the trees behind our backs and tossed them into the trenches Horribly cold, they fell behind the collars of our great-coats keeping us from getting warm At dawn it began to freeze Our jaws ached from being clenched tight all night with cold They ached so much that when we got our mess-tins of cold macaroni and our ration of rusks we could hardly eat

The section commander, a browless sergeant, had spent the night with us His foxhole was nearby and after dark he had climbed over to our emplacement With three of us pressed together it wasn t so cold He talked for a long time telling us of his life and complaining bitterly

This is my first time at war too he said but it s harder for me You boys are educated It s easier for educated people

He talked and talked, then huddled between us and fell asleep At dawn the platoon commander roused him

Sergeant! the lieutenant called out from the breastwork Why aren t you in your own foxhole? Why are you sleeping?

The sergeant rose to his knees and saluted

I m not eating Comrade Lieutenant!

I m asking you why you re sleeping! the lieutenant exclaimed

I m not eating I m not eating, Comrade Lieutenant, the sergeant continued to babble still at attention on his knees

Ye gods! the lieutenant roared Have you gone stark raving mad? Stand up!

Yes, Comrade Lieutenant the sergeant said continuing to kneel and hold his hand in a salute

It was a pitiful and ridiculous sight Kolya and I helped the sleep-dazed sergeant to his feet and out of the trench

The two walked away The sergeant returned a few minutes later and assembled the section around his foxhole under the birch trees He said that *Katyusha* rocket launchers would soon be arriving to fire from our positions We were to keep to the trenches and not stick our heads out

What, *Katyushas!?* They had already become legendary

Sure enough three trucks came driving down the overgrown forest track They were ordinary trucks, only with things like rails tipped up over the cabs They lined up in a row on the edge of the woods Cheerful, smartly dressed men leaped out of the cabs

Greetings, me hearties! one of them called out towards the trenches, from which inquisitive heads were sticking

One by one we gathered around the trucks One of the drivers launched a lively banter with us We looked downcast and rumpled our faces grey from the cold and sleepless nights The driver slapped one on the back and jostled another, keeping up a steady stream of salty wisecracks

Snap out of the doldrums! ' he said It s the Germans should be down-in-the-mouth, not you Because your boys have given it them good and hard up to the hilt, trimmed them down a bit Now we ll add a bit and things ll start humming

Our platoon commander stood for a while listening to the banter then as though remembering something, drew himself up and ordered us to 'stand by

Lay off, chief, ' the driver said 'They ll have time enough in the trenches yet

The lieutenant shrugged and left us be We showered the driver with questions how were things at the front, where were Germans, was it true the *Katyushas* burned everything to the ground, and so on, and so forth

The road along which we had come was the straightest road to Warsaw and the nazis were driving along it towards Moscow They were opposed here by Moscow volunteer units The Germans had smashed these ill-trained troops and were now approaching Maloyaroslavets, a good spring-board for the attack on Moscow The Podolsk cadets had barred their way Some ten miles ahead forward battalions had been fighting for two whole days now

The driver told us everything keeping up his stream of banter and encouraging us, and we felt better

The stand by order rang out and we scattered to our trenches Something hissed the hissing mounted to a thunderous roar and the lower part of the rail tracks of the first truck spewed forth trails of fire Then the upper part of the tilted rails spat fire and one after another long heavy ingots slid off them You could see them as they flew out, strangely reminiscent of swiftly winging cranes with narrow heads stretched forward on long necks They swished over the trees and out of sight beyond the woods in the direction our machine-gun s little black muzzle was pointing The trucks hurled their ingots in rapid succession turned and quickly disappeared along the forest track

Gosh Kolya exclaimed excitedly For some reason he unbuckled his belt unbuttoned his greatcoat then belted it again Yeh those *Katyushas* are the real thing!

The sun rose kindling autumn colours in the woods Small fires sprang up here and there some way from the trenches Discarding our knapsacks we took turns warming up drying our footcloths and changing our boots

A German reconnaissance plane appeared high in the clear morning sky We hastily stamped out the fires Half an hour later the bombing began Our first First the bombs fell on the farm where our headquarters was located Then, wailing and screaming horribly the planes began to dive over the clearing All but shaving off the fir-tree tops they ripped through the air over the trenches dropping black bodies of bombs as they skimmed by The earth rose higher than the trees in greasy fountains broken birches and firs fell crashing to the ground blue, evil-smelling smoke filled the air A deafening roar rang in our ears as though a multitude of steam-rollers were bouncing over a tin roof

Having dropped their bombs the planes returned to strafe us with machine-gun fire Unable to stand it any longer, someone began firing a rifle at the planes

'Cease fire! ' the platoon commander shouted and the shooting stopped

There is nothing more dreadful and humiliating than to sit beneath an open sky and wait for a bomb to descend on you or a burst of machine-gun fire to hit you Turning our necks as best we could with heads drawn into our shoulders, we watched helplessly the bombers orgy but after the second and third raid this became unbearable The platoon commander forbade us to shoot so as not to reveal our positions though I was sure they could not be revealed more than they already were from the air

We tried retreating into the shelter of the forest, but there too it was impossible to sit out–or lie out–the wail of the hedge-hopping bombers and whistle of falling metal

The sun was already high over the forest, but the Germans continued to send planes over at half-hour intervals

The clearing was ploughed up with shell holes and we were, to put it mildly, sick and tired of this riot of steel We crouched opposite each other on the bottom of our foxhole Kolya looked at me fiercely and for the first time in his life, swore obscenely Well, that s it, I thought That means we re real soldiers now He ripped the knapsack off his back, pulled out a small volume of Blok and, shielding his head with his trench shovel, proceeded to recite

> You are millions but legion is our name
> Come fight us at your peril
> We are Scythians That s right, we're Asiatics!
> With slanting, avid eyes '

He recited 'The Scythians and other poems while the planes spat hot lead down on us Almost imperceptibly Kolya drew in his head adjusted his shovel and carried on reading

Whe-e-e-ee-Bam! A bomb struck somewhere nearby and earth showered down on us Kolya fell silent because we were pressed down to the bottom of the trench, buried as though we were already done for dead But we were alive, and when we shook off the earth and rose I said,

Let s have that poem of yours about the Red Commissar

What?

About the Red Commissar

What poem are you talking about, Kolya said, spitting out bits of earth that gritted on the teeth 'Can t you see this is quite different

I hadn t realised it at first All we had seen so far, all that was going on right now was quite unlike Kolya s poem There he had a well-ordered, colourful Civil War It was all very beautiful, and the Red Commissar s death was not at all terrible He was being shot by the Whites and he stood proudly before them, coolly

staring death in the face The Commissar died very beautifully in the name of freedom and the revolution

No I said after a while I suppose this war isn t like that And people don t die like that They don t face firing squads Nowadays people die in battle without even having seen the enemy face to face

I ll write about the Red Commissar later on Kolya said when we finish the war

Yes we ll see yet how it all turns out

At last the bloody planes flew away Amazingly not one of the cadets had been killed or even wounded So in war one didn t necessarily die immediately All that metal dropped on us all those trees blasted down, laid flat–even our machine-gun had been damaged by a fragment–but it apparently wasn t so easy to kill a man

That evening a platoon arrived from the forward line and we moved out to replace them The overgrown road led us back to the Warsaw Highway We walked in silence like some stealthy prowlers The platoon commander spoke in a whisper hissing when he had to issue an order We weren t allowed to smoke even into our sleeves You could feel with your whole skin the proximity of the enemy Especially when we came out of the forest

We reached a village The dark silhouettes of houses clustered on both sides In the middle of the village the road came to an end before a demolished bridge across a steep-banked little stream Beyond the stream lay the enemy positions We turned left taking care not to make ourselves conspicuous climbed a slope crossed a foot-bridge over a deep ditch running beside a row of houses and halted in what had once been an enclosed yard A half-wrecked shed stood on the bank of the stream At the other end of the yard a cellar reared a black hump The yard was spacious and empty because the house–its principal structure–was razed to the ground In the rather awesome silence we walked about the yard and discovered freshly dug trenches The platoon commander assigned us our positions and we settled down to a weary nocturnal wait

How long can you go without sleep? The bastards probably weren t even contemplating an attack But neither did they care to leave us alone Before evening they carried out three more artillery shellings Three more times we experienced the sickening fear sweeping through the whole being as mortar shells popped hollowly–

as though sucking in air in their flight The Germans only laid off after dark

Sleep descended on us together with the darkness The platoon commander assigned us turns for sleep

The sky was dark and starless when Kolya s and my turn came We sat in the bottom of the trench, heads drawn into the raised collars of our greatcoats But the penetrating cold denied us the enjoyment of slumber The cellar was nearby, and we decided to get into it Inside we gathered together some half-rotted rags, padded the ground with them made pillows of our knapsacks and closed the door We slept the sleep of the dead for a whole eternity I woke with a start, roused by an eerie silence that struck me like a blow I prodded Kolya Night was still seeping in through the crack of the door

Apprehensively, we pushed the door open and peered out A glimmering white silence greeted us The ground was powdered with snow white, eerie snow, unmarred by a single footstep White flakes fluttered noiselessly down Why did the snow fall so noiselessly? Like someone creeping up on tiptoe, with bated breath I shivered and looked about There was something wrong Alarmed, we hastened to the closest trench The section commander wasn t there We dashed to another trench–no one To a third–empty! My heart began to pound It already sensed that something had happened But my mind was still unable to fathom what We were really getting rattled We turned together to the highway Whew damn it! There they were

Boys! Kolya shouted, and dashed across the yard to the footbridge Boys! he repeated when we were across

A flare hissed and rose into the air, snatching out of the darkness the black, glossy backs and helmets of enemy soldiers We dropped to the snow at the top of the slope As the flare slid noiselessly down from the sky we stared unblinkingly at the black raglans and the black helmets glinting eerily in the deathly light The soldiers were stealing along the road

The flare went out The raglans and helmets melted into a black blot on the dull whiteness of the snow The patch moved and began to draw out into a line writhing and muttering in clipped, guttural accents "*Ab!* *Auf!*

There was a machine-like precision in the curt ejaculations the practised businesslike manner of a well-knit gang

There they were! Kolya half-rose and fussed with something Surely he didn t want to throw a grenade? He couldn t! There were only the two of us Before I could crawl over to stop him his hand

described an arc and he dropped to the ground A hubbub of alarmed voices rose from the road and was drowned by the blast Kolya jumped up and raced back crouching low hissing fiercely "Follow me! as he passed me

At first I dashed after him, but something stopped me I turned stood, and hurled my own grenade down to the road

I raced over the footbridge and made a dash for the cellar Kolya wasn t there I peered into the yard no one there either On the highway down below submachine-guns barked feverishly On the other side, the end house went up in flames They spread rapidly, and by the light of the blaze I could see black soldiers running about on the road They regrouped then hurried towards the demolished bridge Others made for our yard firing submachine-guns Red reflections from the blaze flickered through the half-open door into the cellar I hugged the door jamb and fearful of being discovered, watched the black figures clamber up towards the footbridge over the ditch My mouth felt dry my knees shook and like long long ago, when I had heard of the outbreak of war I felt my legs buckling under me But I couldn t let myself drop to the knees because then I wouldn t see the black soldiers coming up to kill me With eyes riveted to the black soldiers approaching closer and closer, I scooped some snow from the doorstep and swallowed it waiting I know not what for

But when the first one stepped onto the narrow footbridge a heavy machine-gun barked forth from somewhere–from underground it seemed The man flung his arms up incongruously and fell into the ditch He had travelled hundreds of miles along the Warsaw Highway to steal into this yard and then into the cellar to finish me off But with only three dozen paces left he toppled over into the ditch Meanwhile the machine-gun continued to rattle resonantly from underground, and the black soldiers wavered and scrambled back Something broke within me I raised my rifle and began firing at the retreating forms without taking aim

The blaze subsided Its flickering glow no longer reached me But that was probably because dawn was breaking My own shooting gave me courage and I ventured out into the yard to search for Kolya I wandered along the empty trenches and decided to look into the half-destroyed shed I walked over the soft snow musing that here I was, all alone in the war I was so engrossed in my thoughts that I did not immediately notice Kolya signalling wildly to me from the shed, trying to attract my attention with signs gestures and grimaces I bounced in and hugged him as though I hadn t seen him for years I wasn t even really surprised to see

other people besides Kolya in the shed, nor that the shed was a shed only from the outside, and within it was a concrete pillbox with a 45-mm gun

So the wanderers turned up at last, one of the artillerymen said gruffly but with evident relief

There were five of them including the commander whom they addressed as Commissar He was tough and collected and you could see that he was fully aware of the tasks facing him and of why he was there I also knew, like the others, why we were there Unlike the rest of us of whom many other things could be said the only thing you could really say of him was that he was busy fighting Whatever he did–whether he spoke, gave an order, looked at you with his light unsmiling eyes, or just moved about–in everything I saw only war A man totally engaged in war The only thing he asked me was my name, and he repeated what he had evidently already told Kolya that according to Army Regulations we were duty-bound to obey the orders of the commander of the unit in which circumstances found us

From that moment on Kolya and I became something in between artillerymen and infantry attached to the artillery

Our task, the Commissar said, is to fight the enemy That's primary And hold the defence That's also primary

Then he gave the order for breakfast The artillerymen laid some sausage and bread out on a caisson We ate standing, taking turns to keep watch through the embrasure Under the Commissar the men even ate as though they were carrying out an important combat assignment For the first time after we left camp I felt relaxed and at ease, because I had boundless faith in the Commissar For some reason it seemed to me that here, on this sector, everything would be just as he planned it

Kolya and I sat on a caisson talking, still excited about our narrow escape and relieved to be together again We smoked and chatted, glancing at the young artillerymen, at the embrasure through which could be seen the other side with the hump of the road against the sky Behind us lay Moscow We were thinking of Moscow, of all that was so dear to us there, of our friends and acquaintances and, of course of Natasha, when someone called out sharply to the Commissar Over there, where the road reared up against the sky, a black car rolled over the hump and coasted swiftly down the slope On it came, so calm and assured, so jolly and frightening at the same time

Thus began another day of fighting The gunner turned to the Commissar

Comrade Commissar one shell? he pleaded

The Commissar waved his hand in agreement The swarthy young gunner proceeded to sight the gun The barrel rocked slightly up and down and spat fire with a roar deafening us momentarily and drawing a veil of smoke across the embrasure The black car seemed to hit an invisible wall its doors flapped open like broken wings and it stood where it was Two nazis leaped out simultaneously and we could see them hastily scrambling on all fours to the roadside bushes

A minute passed, then another and it began to seem as if nothing had happened, as if the black car with the flapping doors had always been standing there before the demolished bridge on the snow-powdered road

The earth, slightly covered with snow, the copses and bushes, the dark silhouettes of the distant forest waited in silent expectation for something to happen Or rather it was we invisible in our concrete pillbox who were waiting for whatever it was to happen

The silence was unstable and deceptive Dark figures streaked between the walls of forest along the edge of the highway Then some more Two figures hesitated and stopped

Comrade Commissar the swarthy gunner pleaded again in a whisper Please

The Commissar said nothing We all knew that shells had to be expended sparingly But the gunner s face bore such a pleading expression that his mates seconded his request

They re standing there, the bastards, Comrade Commissar! Look at them standing there!

The Commissar selected a shell himself hefted it in his hands and reluctantly handed it to the loader

If you miss, look out! I ll knock your block off

Not on your life! the gunner retorted gleefully

The gun roared A black fountain of earth leaped to the sky and rained to the ground Before we had time to make out what had happened to the figures, two more appeared and hastily dragged the bodies off the road

I d never before seen live snipers I d never even *heard* of artillery snipers While we were congratulating the gunner and the boys were recalling various similar cases two tanks appeared over the hump Grinding down the young snow they moved ponderously but swiftly down the road, their gun barrels sticking out menacingly and spitting fire

Armour-piercing shells! the Commissar ordered curtly

The artillerymen dashed to the caissons The cannon loaded, they stood by with more shells The seconds ticked by agonisingly

slowly The tanks were already halfway to the bridge Then the gun barked and bucked The first shell hit the second tank The front one turned, exposing its armoured side to our sniper The gun barked again–and the tank stood there, barring the road Another shot, and a fatty flame licked the armour and rose higher The tankmen leaped out of the hatch, followed by clouds of black smoke

It looked as if the god of war if one believed in him had got down to business So far he was on our side But where, in what place and of what nature, would his next move be?

Forestalling his intentions, the Commissar ordered me, Kolya and two of the artillerymen to take up defensive positions outside, to the left and right of the shed More and more enemy soldiers spurted past the dark shell hole, and we were already firing at these lone targets when the Commissar appeared and ordered us to shift our fire to the left, where he had spotted infantry concentrating in a birch copse across the river Shells began to fall amidst the enemy infantrymen running down to the river in short spurts

The air rustled hotly overhead Gun and mortar shells began to churn up our soil again The fire swiftly gathered strength The god of war was having the time of his life

A shell kicked up earth right beneath the embrasure We held our breaths, expecting trouble but our gun retaliated immediately So it was alright after all Suddenly the enemy shelling ceased

Over here! Quick! someone shouted from over to the left

We rushed to the trench leading from the pillbox and lay down behind the breastwork Now we were facing the garden on our left flank

So that was why they d ceased their bombardment they d already crossed the stream! The Germans crawled out of the willow thickets, stood up and advanced up the slope, submachine-guns pressed against their bellies spitting fire I had no time to fill the clips and kept up fire with single cartridges hastily shoved into the cartridge chamber At first I fired without taking aim, while they advanced closer and closer Then I began choosing a target and shooting at it But they continued to advance, and my chosen target with them I tried to keep calm but my target continued to advance towards me Now I began to tremble they were coming on and on up the slope, right towards us Their bullets were already whining overhead

The Commissar rolled out a Maxim machine-gun and lay behind it next to me He glanced at me and must have noticed my confusion

Scared?

My rifle doesn t hit, I mumbled

The Commissar glanced at my weapon and spat out angrily The sight!

Damn it! The sight was set for distant targets My hand shook slightly, but I managed to set the sight for a hundred yards I took aim and fired A sudden hot wave of joy swept through me After all, I had been a pretty good shot back at the school The green living target stumbled fell to its knees and disappeared behind a hump on the slope The blood pounded in my temples

Here and there green-clad tommy-gunners began to drop out of the jagged, ragged, broken skirmish line Then something prodded them on, the line jerked and the Germans rushed forward, overcoming the last few yards of the slope Now they were running across the snow-powdered vegetables I went cold deep down inside At that moment the Commissar s machine-gun leaped into action in a deep, very precise staccato, which I immediately recognised as that of my nocturnal saviour It was he who had lashed out, as though from underground, at the black soldiers on the road

The Germans collapsed into the vegetables throwing up snow dust

The bastards couldn t take it! They turned and rushed helter-skelter back down to the willow thickets the Maxim whipping them on with a leaden lash

Kolya yelled first Hurra-a-a-ah! he ululated rising to his knees

I followed suit Hurr-a-a-ah!

The Commissar wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his greatcoat and for the first time I saw a smile on his earnest face

That s all he said We re out of ammunition And he trundled the machine-gun along the embankment

The swarthy face of the gunner peered out of the pillbox He winked at us merrily and smiled

That day the Commissar shot one of the artillerymen, and there were only six of us left

The second attack had been worse than the first but we beat it off With hand-grenades When the Germans retreated beyond the river again, a truck drove into the next yard It was loaded with shells, small arms ammunition and anti-tank grenades We transferred the ammunition to the pillbox, said good-bye to the driver and walked back to our position To the right, in our neighbours

sector, a fierce battle was raging The Commissar listened and said addressing no one in particular Pretty hot there

We walked back, all of us realising that the third attack would be woise still Somewhere right by the forest behind us, faint, pale flaies rose skyward We pretended not to see them, but I was certain that each one of us was wondering about those strange signals One of the artillerymen, a still pink and puffy-cheeked lad stopped and said Comrade Commissar, we ve got to retreat' He said it with abject calm but everyone, the Commissar included, looked back as though stung They re shooting flares way over there The artilleryman pointed fearfully towards our rear I saw them myself

The Commissar stared silently at the man, evidently searching for the necessary words, and unable to find them The artilleryman withered under that look Suddenly his face distorted and he began to shout What are you all looking at me like that for? You ve got no right! If you want to die, go ahead! I don't want to die! You ve no right!'

He kept shouting and looking back at the truck, then made a dash

Halt you sonovabitch! The Commissar drew his revolver and raised his arm

The man looked back, froze momentarily, but at that moment the driver revved up the truck and he ran on The truck was already moving and the lad lunged forward and caught hold of the tailgate The shot rang out and his hands relinquished their hold. He fell on his face The Commissar stood still for several moments, then put the revolver back into its holster His hand trembled barely perceptibly

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New sounds broke into the sustained din of the battle, the rapid tattoos of submachine-guns, the nervous bursts of intermittent rifle fire and the heavy rat-tat-tat of a machine-gun artillery blasts and the roar of engines shook the air Kolya, I, the Commissar and the artillerymen turned as one man towards the street Tanks were advancing rapidly along it, firing as they went Guns from the German side answered them

Ours! ' the Commissar exclaimed

The Germans also spotted the tanks, ceased their fire and hit the ground A lull ensued The tanks stopped as if in wonder before the demolished bridge, right in front of our yard We clustered in the shelter of the shed and peered at the revving machines

Crosses on the armour ' someone said in a subdued voice

Yes, there were yellow crosses on all the tanks But why had they come from back there, from our side?

They re our men, in captured tanks the Commissar said

Why, of course they were ours in captured tanks!

The hatch of the foremost tank opened and a man s head and shoulders emerged a skull and crossbones on the black sleeve of his black service coat He looked about calmly A pince-nez was perched on his nose The frameless glasses and the white skull on his sleeve seemed to fire a parting shot at me as they vanished into the armour with the yellow cross A nazi!

Collect all hand-grenades, the Commissar said drily

We hurried to the pillbox, collected the grenades and brought them outside The turret of the front tank slowly turned its gun barrel in our direction It stopped, staring at us through its black muzzle With a roar the muzzle spat fire, and a corner of the roof reared with a crash and crumbled to the ground

To the trench! the Commissar ordered and we jumped into the trench

The second shell brought down almost half the roof on us A few yards from the pillbox the trench led into a dugout with a log roof covered with turf Powdered with snow, it blended inconspicuously with the yard Choking with dust we clambered from under the debris and straw chaff and crept into the dugout It was dark as the grave The door through which we entered caved in at once, the exit at the other end, not much more than a mole s hole was covered with an old tree stump looking as though it had been accidentally discarded there Above us the earth moaned and quaked as though someone were pounding it with an immense sledgehammer

Then all was suddenly silent We sat with our backs pressed to the walls of our grave In the pitch darkness I could hear the breathing of all six, I could hear the breathing of Kolya next to me Now they would do something to us For the first time in my life I saw no way out whatsoever My brains worked like mad, but to no avail My thoughts fluttered in a dark, constrained, vicious circle They tossed this way and that and on every side they encountered an obstacle and could find no way out But under that helplessly fluttering thought another last hope of salvation lived that he, the Commissar, knew what to do He would reflect for a while then say something and everything would be clear If not for that other thought I would have begun thinking of the end, of how we had lived, how we had wanted to be useful and been unable to because now within a few minutes, the end would come But I

didn t think of that and only waited for those words which he, the Commissar alone knew He finally said those words But no miracle happened After all, the Commissar was not a god, but an ordinary man He said

Let them think we ve been killed We must wait for the night At night we ll break through

German soldiers walked about on our roof, on the young snow, just above our heads, gabbling something We ll break through at night I thought–and at once began snoring, which I d never in my life done before Someone grabbed me by the front of my coat and shook me hissing curses I cursed myself roundly–and began snoring again And again the Commissar shook me and swore at me This awful scene was repeated several times Repeated until suddenly a bluish beam of light filtered down the mole hole The Germans had discovered the aperture and opened it The light went out as someone stopped up the hole and hurled into our dugout one word that cut like a knife

Russ!

When they were gabbling up there on top, that was one thing But when they lashed us with that word, it was an entirely different matter The word cut through my heart so painfully that I shuddered I didn t snore any more

Russ! And dead silence again

Then they dragged a machine-gun up to the opening, stuck the muzzle through it and opened fire The dry sting of fire fluttered about our hideout with a predatory cackle We pressed back against the walls, pulling up our legs, while the reddish sting feverishly stabbed the darkness, trying to reach us An invisible leaden lash cleaved our grave in two and flicked up the soft dark earth They fired the machine-gun down the length of the dugout for a while, then stopped, evidently satisfied that there were no survivers

It grew quiet Gradually the sheaf of bluish light began to dim and finally went out completely

At last it was night

Time! the Commissar whispered

He fixed the rendez-vous point, in the woods beyond the village He assigned us numbers The gunner was Number One, then came Kolya, I was third, followed by the other two artillerymen, and the Commissar himself was Number Six But first he crawled ahead to reconnoitre, while we waited with bated breath Several minutes dragged by endlessly At last something rustled in the tunnel and the Commissar re-appeared

Alright, he said

He shook Number One by the hand and the gunner disappeared along the tunnel Again without a word the Commissar shook Kolya s hand We hugged each other briefly in the cramped space Kolya s hand was dry and hot

He fussed around in the tunnel for a while then crept back

What s the matter the Commissar asked anxiously

The knapsack won t go through

To hell with the knapsack!

Kolya crawled forward without his knapsack

I too had to discard my knapsack I was still in the tunnel still crawling forward on my belly, when pandemonium broke out up there I leaped out and darted away from the commotion Bullets whizzed by, but none hit me I threw myself to the ground behind the debris of the pillbox A moment later three or four earth-muffled blasts shook the ground

Fires were burning in the neighbouring yard there were Germans there I stumbled across the footbridge to the road and fell into the roadside ditch–and only then did I realise that the explosions had been inside the dugout Number Six The Commissar I lay on the snow in the ditch and sobbed in helpless rage Then I crawled forward on my belly, pulling myself along on my elbows clenching my rifle in my right hand I crawled through a tangle of wires ripped off the telegraph posts At the top of the slope shooting continued

Fragments of thoughts, objects, voices, sounds jumbled together in my throbbing head, jostling and squeezing each other out

There was a street scene I had once happened to witness and had never recalled afterwards But now the foolish irrelevant scene floated up from somewhere A tall, well-dressed woman was walking down a quiet side-street, followed by a tiny tot whirling the pedals of a tricycle, curly head thrown back and bawling at the top of his lungs The woman walked on without looking back while the tot worked his legs madly, turning the pedals He didn t want to go wherever his cruel mother was going, but, sobbing bitterly, he kept turning the pedals for all he was worth That was in Moscow Then there was the tent in the army camp and Kolya singing there The platoon commander walked in and listened When Kolya finished the lieutenant lifted his hand and said

Nicolo Terentini

Nikolai Terentyev, Comrade Lieutenant Kolya muttered sullenly

Begging your pardon, Cadet Terentyev, the lieutenant said

Then the earnest face of our Number Six rose before my eyes I saw his unsmiling light eyes, and deeply regretted not knowing his



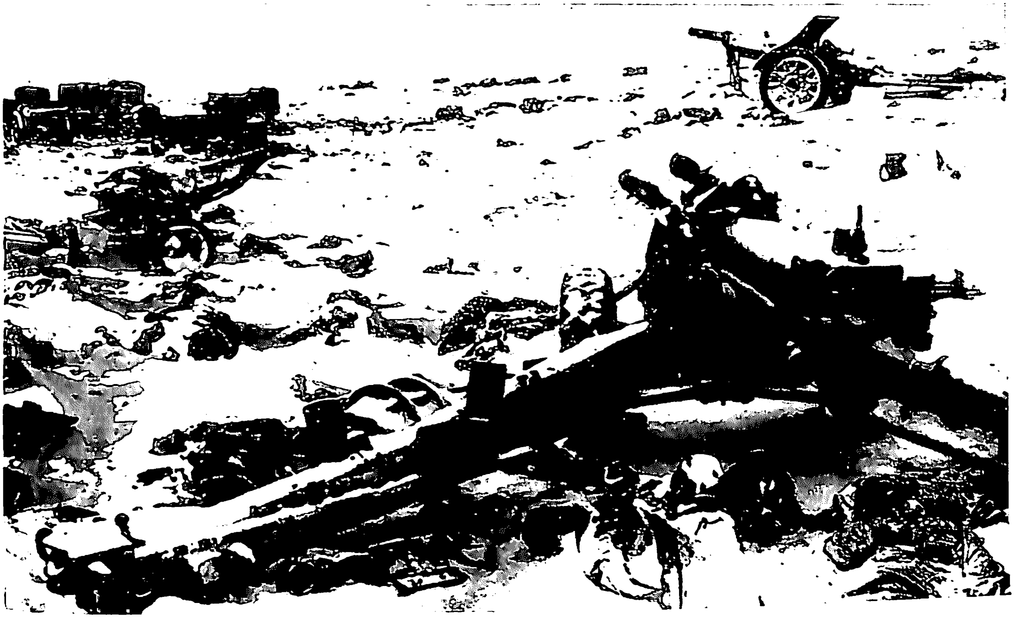
The Red Flag flutters again over Stalingrad



Field-Marshal von Paulus goes into captivity









German prisoners-of-war march through Moscow: they made it at last, almost three years late—and unarmed



Detail of the memorial to the defenders of Stalingrad on Mamayev Kurgan

... The blasted car, the burning tank, the terrible tanks with yellow crosses. They weren't there on the road any more, gone somewhere.

My tears dried I looked about the empty road and crawled along the snow-covered ditch I could already see the last houses Dawn was approaching I rose to my feet and ran so as to get out of the village while it was still dark

Wer ist das? That came from the last house

I hit the ground and waited Silence Must have been imagining things that German patrolman

I crawled on again working my elbows and rifle

At last the village lay behind and I could get up A snow-covered field stretched before me Beyond it loomed the dark forest with streaks of grey the place of our rendez-vous Someone was lying beside the black water of an unfrozen stream In a green cape A friend But I lifted my rifle

Who goes there?

Friend the man groans

I lifted the wounded man He clung to my neck as we crossed the endless empty white field towards the forest It was snowing and Kolya wasn t with us Perhaps this snow of nineteen forty-one is falling on his already cold body?

Where are our main lines? I asked the wounded man

Don t know

That moment is so far off that it is as if it never was

Green grass and blooming flowers cover the ground, and the Warsaw Highway runs down through that selfsame village, just as it did long ago in 1941 And as then, it climbs up the hill beyond the bridge reaching into the sky

This road of nineteen forty-one goes on to Yukhnov, through other towns all the way to Warsaw Day and night it hums busily beneath the wheels of automobiles Like then, the rivulet with the steep banks is smothered in willow and young alder thickets The village, with children and chickens in the little green yards, is sadly commonplace and at first glance indifferent to all that happened here that late autumn and early winter But that is only at first glance

Natasha and I simply had to see those places where our decayed cadet knapsacks lie, where I embraced Kolya for the last time Kolya alive then, missing in action ever since

Opposite the club where young people sing and laugh in the evenings on the spot where the statue of Lenin once stood, a ply-



Detail of the memorial to the defenders of Stalingrad on Mamayev Kurgan

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wood pyramid with a small star on the spire rises above the green grass and wild flowers–the grave of an Unknown Soldier

But no, I shall not call him by that sublime and bitter name–Unknown Soldier Because our Kolya Terentyev lies there I recognised him at once from the accounts of the local villagers

The small living fortresses that had held the front along the gullied banks of the stream were encircled and routed by the enemy They passed along the Warsaw Highway to Maloyaroslavets and captured the town And this village, strung out along the highway was deep in their rear And before the Germans were driven out they had had time to repair the demolished bridge and shoot Kolya Terentyev

They were still confident that they had come for good and tried to convince everyone of it All the people they discovered in cellars and dugouts were herded together at the club First they shot down the statue at point-blank range from a cannon Old folk, women and children huddled together fearfully They looked straight in front of them with unseeing eyes, but they saw and heard everything

A wounded cadet without a coat, wearing a service cap, was hoisted up several caissons to the grey rock where Lenin had stood a moment before He was wounded in the chest but still alive

The soldiers aimed their rifles and waited for the command

The officer tarried Then he turned to the crowd, nodded at the cadet in the cap with the crimson band, and said

'*Kommissar* '

The wounded man slowly lifted his arm and muttered something No one heard what he said but the crowd moved the Commissar remained standing his arm raised

What did he see before him? Natasha and perhaps myself and Tolya Yudin, and Lyova Drozd, and Maryana and Vitya Lastochkin, or maybe he saw all Russia and our iron Commissar But the people saw the hand held aloft till the last moment till the savage yell, *Feuer!* , till the savage salvo, when Kolya Terentyev fell to the base of the stone and became an Unknown Soldier

In the evenings he can hear a new generation singing and laughing the stream babbling over the rocks–our former defence line–and the Warsaw Highway humming round the clock like a taut bow-string But he cannot hear Natasha–an elderly lonely woman–sobbing in the night

Yuri Zhukov

Yuri Zhukov (b 1908) is a *Pravda* correspondent who has made a name for himself covering world affairs

His first collections of essays and articles appeared in the 1930s Later as a war correspondent for *Komsomolskaya Pravda* he wrote an enormous number of articles and news items He was bound by close ties of friendship with the First Tank Guards Division about which he later wrote a book

Yuri Zhukov is the author of several collections about the Great Patriotic War and the immediate post war period They include The Taming of the Tigers The Road to the Carpathians One Out of a Thousand and Those Seventeen Years

THE BIRTH OF THE TANK GUARDS

The Commissar bent forward and touched Katukov lightly on the shoulder

The officer replacements have arrived General

Katukov arose from the mattress flung down on the stone floor rubbed his eyes, and drew himself up, automatically straightening the folds of his greatcoat It was as noisy as ever in the dim, smoky cellar that the General had jokingly named the Leichtweis Cave Signals officers were coming and going, a sturdy doctor was dressing down somebody who was to blame for there being too little water in the field-bath, someone had a racking cough A radio-van mechanic of the psychological warfare branch, trying to shout everybody down, was recounting how attentively the German soldiers had listened to a broadcast specially organised for their benefit that day Practically came scampering out of their dugouts, they did! Tireless Lieutenant-Colonel Kulvinsky, the brigade chief of staff, was standing in the corner taking refuge behind his waterproof cape talking over the telephone in a coded language

Everything s fine We re just short of spurs Three eight has arrived Only the chief is worried about forks The tinned food? Got it alright!

The General smiled Everything was perfectly normal If he were to have woken up in a soft bed in some quiet, empty room, he would doubtless have felt that something was missing

The final preparations were being made for a new operation Tomorrow the brigade was to storm Ludina Gora, a strong link point in the German winter defences set up beyond Volokolamsk

after the Wehrmacht had been driven back from Moscow This strong-point controlled an area within a radius of six to seven miles The original attempt to take it from the direction of the railway station had failed although the enemy had suffered considerable losses

Our troops were exhausted after weary practically uninterrupted fighting first defensive then the offensive from Kryukovo right on Moscow s doorstep to this cursed Ludina Gora 80 miles from the capital But they must attack again and again to drive the hitlerites as far away as possible before the thaw

The Germans desperately wanted to hold the line on the river Lama, to be able to winter there all the more so since from Ludina Gora their artillery was able to shell Volokolamsk

I had taken a look at Ludina Gora that morning from the bell-tower of Volokolamsk cathedral We had climbed up the slippery brick steps badly mutilated by splinters of Krupp steel On the narrow platform spattered with dried pigeon droppings a group of artillery officers had gathered the commanders of the regiments that were to support with their fire the assault on Ludina Gora With them was Lieutenant-General Kamera artillery commander of the Western Front a stout elderly man in a sheepskin coat He was peering attentively into the distance through a pair of powerful field-glasses, scanning the dark-grey and dark-green patches of forest, the snowy hills beyond the frozen river Behind a square pine wood at the top of a steep slope, stood a group of small houses That was Ludina Gora, which the fighting had gone on so long for

The General was briefing the artillery officers as to how they should proceed the next day Remember, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief has ordered that the artillery must go into attack together with the troops As you are no doubt well aware there is no provision for such an event in the manuals They have everything about manoeuvres and fire control Now we have been given a perfectly clear and unambiguous order The artillery must attack This applies to you too, he said, turning to the commander of the heavy artillery regiment Don t wait for requests for fire support Anyone can fire on requests I could be sitting by the phone in Moscow and on being informed of the position of the targets, give the firing orders No now you must attack together with the infantry and tanks, you and your guns The mood of the soldiers will be quite different when they see you up there beside them Your job is to smash all gun emplacements If necessary at point-blank range

This time Ludina Gora must be taken whatever happened That was why such strong forces had been concentrated here Katukov had been given command of a group including the First Rifle Guards and the 49th Rifle Division as well as his own 1st Tank Guards Brigade They were supported by six artillery regiments This was an operation of major importance to the whole Front

The officer replacements have arrived, General, the Commissar repeated Time to begin

The officers were waiting in the next room of the cellar, sitting on broken school benches–here in the village of Ivanovskoye near Volokolamsk there had once stood a building and it had housed an agricultural college A paraffin lamp was winking on the table, and cast patches of yellow light on the faces of the men, which were weather-beaten and stern for their years These men had already had their baptism of fire they had only been out of action temporarily, while recovering from wounds This was the first winter after the German invasion, and they still had much ahead of them those whose lucky star was to see them through from the banks of the quiet Lama river near Moscow to the banks of the far-off German river Spree where they would undertake the final decisive assault

Good afternoon, comrades, the General said quietly as he entered the room

Afternoon! came the thundering reply, and the officers sprang to attention before the man they had heard so much about

They studied the calm, rather weary, thin face of the General, in which there was something of homely simple gentleness combined with the determination of the military man Some of them were a little surprised by the General s rough greatcoat with the grey jersey showing under the collar Katukov caught the look of amazement on the face of one young lieutenant and a sly twinkle sparkled in his eyes

Well now how many veterans have we here? Comrade Zaitsev? I remember you And the rest of you? All fought before? Excellent Let s get acquainted By the way, before we go any further, let s just get one thing clear Those sheepskin coats will have to go They re all very fine, I agree, but we don t like to lose our officers They make too good a target for German snipers You can put your coats on when you go back to the rear When you go into battle, I ll ask you to wear jerseys and greatcoats Like our Commissar here And the General pointed to his companion, standing beside him erect and business-like in a greatcoat You got my point? I ll take it you did

Katukov paused for a moment and stood lıstenıng to the crash of shells nearby (the operatıon he had been carefully followıng the progress of sınce the evenıng before was developıng successfully) Then he contınued

Well then, comrades You ve come to joın the 1st Guards Brıgade It s a great honour for every one of us to serve ın thıs brıgade I thınk we ll get on alrıght There s a lot to tell you and I ll never manage to cover everythıng at one go So just remember the maın thıng Fıghtıng requıres skıll We have plenty of people we can learn from In the brıgade we have real professors of tank warfare, who have been fightıng sınce the first hour of the war Professor Burda had destroyed over thırty enemy tanks So has Professor Samokhın, and we ve plenty of others ın that class– Raftopulo, Zaskalko, Lupov, Vorobyov, Zagudayev Lyubushkın there s no countıng them all Some have already won two or three medals, some have even earned the tıtle of Hero of the Sovıet Unıon Learn from these professors

Katukov looked thoughtful for a moment and hıs eyes shone warmly He loved talkıng about hıs professors of tank warfare and was always ready to recount theır sometımes ıncredıble feats every tıme he dıd so unable to conceal hıs wonder at the great astoundıng strength of the human spırıt

'Combat experıence ıs what decıdes everythıng' he went on Why has Anatoly Raftopulo, for example been hıttıng the Germans so hard where ıt hurts? He s been fightıng longer than any of us Already earned an order for hıs part ın the battle wıth the Japanese at Lake Hasan He won another medal ın the Fınnısh campaıgn Now he s destroyıng the German fascısts, fightıng heroıcally and very cleverly At present he s ın hospıtal He commanded a battalıon, but he ıs perfectly capable of commandıng a regıment I m sure many of our professors wıll ın future be commandıng unıts and even dıvısıons They really know how to fight!

'There were occasıons when our boys went ınto the attack agaınst forces five or sıx tımes as superıor, and stıll beat them It was lıke that at Orel It was cunnıng that counted Some brıgades come out of a two- or three-day battle wıth no tanks left at all But our professors have been fightıng for four months and have lost but a few machınes Two or three tanks may get burnt out but the rest we repaır and they re soon back ın actıon War ıs to last for a long tıme, and ıt's very ımportant for us officers to go sparıngly on machınes and lıves Tomorrow mornıng we ll be launchıng our assault on Ludına Gora Our brıgade joıntly wıth other unıts wıll be developıng the offensıve Thıngs are not goıng too badly We ve

taken Kryukovo, Kamenka, Istra and Volokolamsk But it s still quite a way to Berlin, and we ve got to make sure we get there whatever happens

The General reached out across the table and picked up the dusty chemist s scales that were standing there, having by some miracle survived the holocaust unscathed, all that remained as testimony to the fact that this had once been the physics room of the agricultural college He rocked the horn bowls of the scales thoughtfully then rammed one of them down hard and went on

To tell the truth, we haven t quite the necessary strength for an all-out offensive We could do with more tanks, more artillery and more men We ll naturally have all this in due course But in the meantime, we ve got to go on fighting after all, and we ve got to take Ludina Gora Berlin will come later For the moment, let s remember that in war one cannot weigh up the balance of forces on scales, like these here Our Commissar, Comrade Boiko, is wont to say It s not the strongest but the cleverest who s really strongest I agree with him entirely Comrade Zaitsev here can tell you how we fought against Guderian at Orel Guderian was several times stronger than us, but we won the battle, not him Admittedly it wasn t easy But it s a stout heart that counts When the going s hard just pull yourselves together, and don t show how tough you re finding it Attack, with your wits about you, use your head, that s what it s for Let the German think he s only fighting your advance forces, and that the main force is still intact

It had grown quieter in the next room, and several people came in to listen Tankmen in leather helmets, HQ commanders who had put aside their maps for a moment, reporters arrived to cover an interesting operation, and even little Anyuta, after preparing supper for the officers–everybody was listening attentively to the General s words

In the bustle of front-line life, it was very rare indeed to have a chance to look back to the past, to examine and sum up the results of what had gone before Perhaps that was why Katukov spoke with such enthusiasm, and why his talk to the newly-arrivals had turned into a fascinating lecture on the strategy and tactics of modern warfare He was speaking of the practical deductions to be made from the first battles with the Germans

Of course it was very tempting, he said, to try the various methods that brought the German tank units such success in the invasion of France We all know the power of a concentrated armoured strike, hundreds of tanks advancing implacably, irresistibly, terrifyingly, in a solid mass Tens, maybe even hundreds of them will

be destroyed, but nothing can stop them in the end they re bound to break through even the most solid defence lines But this requires a vast reserve of tanks Without that, the concentrated armoured strike can degenerate into a risky adventure with disastrous results

We had far less tanks than the enemy, and we had to make up our tactics, often improvising as we went along trying to find new tactics appropriate to a particular situation And that s how we did it New tactics were devised by the more talented commanders and their men, new manoeuvres that proved successful in one engagement being repeated in another Katukov told his commanders about this kind of combat, so that they would not blindly follow orders, but constantly seek new tactics on the battlefield

You must understand this essential fact no other arm, except perhaps the airforce needs to show such keen initiative and independence as the tank crew From the moment we receive the order to attack right up to the moment we return, every one of us acts on his own risk and fear Neither I nor my chief of staff can help you in the slightest when you're out there on the battlefield The situation changes from one moment to the next and if you don t use your gumption, but blindly carry out orders I can tell you this now you won t last long You must keep cool, and not go asking for trouble Size up the situation soberly and make your own decision And once you ve made it, stick to it stick to it with all your might and main until you ve carried it out Don t be afraid if the numerical odds are against you You can fight one against ten if you use your nut You ve sized up the situation so you dart out from behind a mound, have a go at the enemy, and dart back quick, out again, to the left this time, land him one more and dart back to cover, out to the right, and let him have another That s how it s done And always keep an eye on what your comrades are up to You cover him, he ll cover you If necessary, hide and lay an ambush Let the enemy come through, and then smash him from behind before he knows what s hit him Remember, tank warfare requires lightning decisions

'You ll find the lads in the battalion only too willing to give you the benefit of their experience I m sure you ll make out alright Just remember I ve said it once and I ll say it again–what counts most in our job is cunning In this, too, our Number One specialist is Alexander Burda That s why we call him Alexander Illarionovich–he s a real Kutuzov Don t underestimate enemy s intelligence

Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov commander in-chief of the Russian armies in the decisive phase of the campaign of the Napoleon s *Grande Armee* in 1812 famous for his cunning tactics

and cunning, always be prepared for some trick There s nothing more dangerous than underestimating one s enemy '

There in the Leichtweis Cave I remembered my previous brief meetings as a war correspondent with this fascinating man and commander

FIRST MEETING IN CHISMENA

I first met Katukov on November 9, 1941, in the quiet village of Chismena near Moscow I stress quiet, for it was the remarkable silence that struck people most of all, aware as they were that the front line was only about six miles away His tank brigade had not yet been named the Tank Guards

The village in the midst of the forest looked extraordinarily peaceful then Smoke was curling above the little houses There were children skiing, and in the evenings girls would gather to sit around and chat But the very air seemed to throb with some oppressive uneasiness, and this pregnant silence was more trying on the nerves than the most deafening cannonade

We found Katukov s HQ in a large peasant cottage Time-blackened icons hung in the corner and a type-writer clattered away behind the stove A large map was spread out on the table and a group of people in leather overcoats were gathered round it, among them Colonel Katukov He was just the same then as he is now–calm, somewhat ironic, and a master at hiding from those around him anything that happened to be worrying him

To celebrate the recent holiday , a sacramental bottle of port was produced from safe keeping in the icon corner, where it had been enshrined under the watchful gaze of dark-faced St Nicholas, and–wonder of wonders–some large red apples, a present from Alma-Ata

Well, shall I tell you something divine about the wolves? The Colonel's eyes sparkled playfully

The Colonel looked the pair of us over curiously, sizing us up the two reporters from *Komsomolskaya Pravda* who had unexpectedly descended on Chismena I and my companion Mitya Chernenko, the secretary of the editorial board, were dressed in rather startling garb Neither of us had yet been officially accredited to the political department, and had therefore not received military uniforms Chernenko sported the dress of an arctic winterer, which he had obtained at the North Sea Lines Administration, and I was wearing boots I had wisely procured from a shoemaker the day of

the German invasion army trousers and a forage cap I had begged from somebody and a short leather jacket which had been rather dashing many moons ago when the volunteers from Spain had returned home, and which I had bought in a second-hand shop—altogether a rather exotic get-up for the front But Katukov had no doubt seen far stranger sights in the course of the war and he politely suppressed the twinkle in his eyes and tried to look perfectly serious

Embarrassed and full of apologies we tried to start a business-like conversation without delay We realised that the position at the front was extremely grave and the Colonel could spare little time talking to reporters Yet there was a great deal we wanted to know The 4th Tank Brigade had only recently arrived here from the left flank of the Moscow defence lines, where in the hard October days it had fought magnificently against Guderian s Panzer units that were crashing towards the capital near Orel

The situation at that time had been, to put it bluntly desperate We were being depressed by the news of ever more grave events Here is what I wrote in my diary on October 6th

Tragic new setbacks Everything was normal in the morning I was getting on with my job as usual, pasting the columns on the make-up Chernenko was called to the Political Department, and some sailor friends of ours back from the Far North, were telling us about this and that Suddenly the war correspondent Kolya Markevich came walking in briskly, erect and trim as usual, tore off a piece of paper and wrote two words on it Orel Abandoned 'What?! That s right I couldn t believe it it was too unexpected As far as we were aware Orel was well in the rear of our front lines Our troops were still resisting fiercely much further to the west And suddenly

But in the evening our anxiety grew Fyodorov and Fishman arrived frozen through from the Western Front These two usually talkative men were silent for once, as if struck dumb Then Lyubimov and Chernyshev came in The car s broken down Have to get it repaired

What s going on there?

No time now the Ed wants to see us

"And at last the truth, the whole bitter truth The Germans had launched a massive new offensive

'It had begun at ten to six in the evening on October 2, with a raid by fourteen planes of the Luftwaffe flying in an arrow formation on the front HQ at Kasno, in the famous old country house

reputed to have served Tolstoi as a model for Prince Bolkonsky s home in War and Peace

Fyodorov had been two hundred yards away in the editorial office of the front-line newspaper, in the forest and had seen it all Despite the strong anti-aircraft barrage the HQ was soon a shambles under the shower of heavy bombs

The raid cut off the HQ from the army and at that moment the Germans launched a fierce attack along the whole front On the right flank our line held Dovator s Cavalry had boldly repulsed the attack on Bely Chernyshev was busy writing an article about it now Yartsevo was held by the Baikal units under the brilliant, wise General Rokossovsky But the Germans have managed to drive a wedge between Bely and Yartsevo The second German spearhead drove through south of Yelnya In the south the Panzers broke through and advanced like an avalanche on Spas-Demensk and Yukhnov Yukhnov fell and the Germans advanced to Gzhatsk in an attempt to seize the Moscow-Minsk highway, cut off Vyazma and strike towards Moscow

Earlier before the beginning of the offensive on the Western Front Guderian s 2nd Panzer Army had broken through the Bryansk Front advanced to Orel, captured the town and turned northwards They say that Bryansk has also fallen today

Of course the Germans aren t going to find the roads to Moscow stretching out like a red carpet before them The reserve armies are there to block their advance But this does not lessen the gravity of the present situation There is only one comforting thought Leningrad is still standing firm as a rock, although the situation in the city is desperate Apparently the Germans have realised the city is not going to fall and have called off their offensive on that front after wasting so many thousands of lives in the Leningrad suburbs The Leningrad newspapers have begun to arrive again (by air) Received Leningradskaya Pravda and Smyena for October 3

It was in those anxious days that we first heard the names of the future tank Guardsmen–Katukov, Gusev, Burda, Molchanov Lavrinenko, Lyubushkin and others Their names appeared in the communiques from the southern sector, the direction of the most dangerous breakthrough Guderian s Panzers were driving towards Moscow attempting to follow up their earlier successes The reports were rather vague and patchy, since naturally much had to be kept dark as military secrets But one thing was clear a new armoured unit had gone into action, armed with powerful tanks, and was being extremely successful It was not merely fighting a

defensive battle, but was counter-attacking on the approaches to Orel

Only many years later from reading the fascinating memoirs of General Lelyushenko, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, did I learn all the details of the events that at the time had been shrouded in such an impenetrable veil of military secrecy

Earlier General Lelyushenko, appointed Deputy Commander of the Main Armoured Forces Department, had been busy hastily forming twenty-two new tank brigades The men who had already gained considerable experience in the first hard months of the fighting, now received excellent new T-34 and KV tanks which were incomparably better than the more or less obsolete models they had used hitherto One of these new brigades was formed at Prudboi near Stalingrad and was commanded by Colonel Katukov

Late on the evening of October 1 Lelyushenko was suddenly summoned to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief in the Kremlin

You ve several times requested to be sent to the front It is now possible to grant your request said Stalin

I m very glad to hear it

Well, that s fine Hand over your command and take over the First Special Guards Corps Actually, the Corps does not yet exist but you will form it in the shortest possible time Your task will be to halt the enemy Panzer group that has broken through the Bryansk Front and is advancing on Orel I believe it is commanded by Guderian You can get the details from Shaposhnikov

Thank you for your trust

All this came to Lelyushenko as a bolt from the blue What units was his Corps to include? Shaposhnikov Chief of the General Staff, gave Lelyushenko more details, which disturbed the tank general still more Firstly it emerged that the situation in the Orel area was indeed extremely critical he was given four or five days in which to form the Corps Secondly it was clear that it would be an extremely difficult task to gather together the units he had been put in command of The 5th and 6th Guards Infantry Divisions had to come all the way from the Leningrad Front the 11th Tank Brigade was almost a hundred miles from Moscow, the 1st Airborne Corps was 190 miles from the assembly point, while the 41st Cavalry Division also had quite a long way to come

Katukov s 4th Tank Brigade was nearest of all it had already arrived from Prudboi to Kubinka near Moscow The men had just left the troop trains when they received the order to reboard as quickly as possible and proceed to Mtsensk

Lelyushenko was summoned to the GHQ a second time that

same night The situation had deteriorated still further Guderian was approaching Orel, and Lelyushenko was now ordered to complete the formation of the new corps not in four or five days, but in a couple of days and meanwhile he had to go straight to Orel and investigate the situation on the spot

On October 3 the commander of the practically speaking non-existent Special Corps arrived in Mtsensk and was met with the unexpected news that Guderian s Panzers had already captured Orel and were advancing northwards rapidly The experienced and dangerous panzer General, one of the creators of nazi Germany s armoured might and responsible for the Wehrmacht s strategy and tactics in France and Poland, where he had had ample opportunity to put his theories to the test, was fond of repeating Friedrich Wilhelm s remark 'The more rapid the offensive the less victims," a maxim he was wont to put into practice with devastating effectiveness

At this critical juncture on the night of October 4, 1941, the first train carrying men and tanks of the 4th Tank Brigade arrived at Mtsensk station Katukov had sixty new tanks, including seven KVs and many T-34s, superlative machines which Guderian himself had publicly declared to be the best in the world So far only Gusev s tank battalion had arrived A battalion is not much against a whole division, but every one of the men in this battalion were worth ten Germans there was Burda and Lavrinenko, Lyubushkin and Molchanov and Kapotov and many others whose names were soon to bring glory to the Soviet armoured forces

Katukov wasted no time dallying, but immediately sent out two tank groups to reconnoitre in the direction of Orel One of them was led by the battalion commander himself, Gusev, and the other by company commander Burda With them went tank-borne troops Shortly after the tanks had set out southwards, General Lelyushenko arrived Katukov informed him of his decision, and they set off at full speed after the reconnaissance groups, to take a look for themselves at what was happening in Orel area Colonel Ryabov, who stayed behind in Mtsensk as Katukov s deputy was there to receive the troop trains as they arrived one after the other with the rest of the Brigade and sent the tanks forward to receive their orders from the General

This was how the battle began that was destined to play an important role in the defence of Moscow At the time, as I have said we did not know all the details of how Katukov had sent his tanks into battle We only knew what we gleaned from the terse communiques, which ran as follows

'Having captured Orel the German Panzer group tried to continue its advance northwards But already on the outskirts of Orel the Germans ran into Soviet tanks These were the advance units of our forces

On meeting with the resistance the Germans began to act cautiously but did not abandon their attempts to advance They are throwing in concentrated groups of 30 to 60 tanks but are everywhere being met with strong counter-attacks

'About sixty enemy tanks attacked Comrade Katukov s advance units They were met by Comrade Yeremin s unit (Comrade Yeremin commanded a regiment in Katukov s brigade –Yu Zh) The Germans left 34 tanks on the battlefield Lavrinenko s platoon particularly distinguished itself in the fighting It engaged 14 nazi tanks Lavrinenko himself destroyed four of them and Sergeant Kapotov s and Lieutenant Polyakov s crew crippled another three The platoon suffered no losses

Commander Burda s tank company has just returned from the Orel area after 37 hours of fighting from ambushes attacking tanks lorries and infantry The company suffered no losses

On October 9 the enemy launched a new offensive to the north of Orel The Germans attacked our defence lines with a Panzer division and large numbers of infantry The battle lasted until late in the evening but the enemy failed to break the resistance of Comrade Lelyushenko s troops

Between October 14th and 16th German pressure in the Orel region weakened The incessant battles waged by our units for eleven whole days against the advancing German forces exhausted the enemy considerably During these eleven days the 3rd and 4th Panzer Divisions alone lost nearly 150 tanks over 2 000 officers and men, about 100 guns more than 200 lorries and large quantities of other arms and equipment The fascist troops in this sector of the front were forced to slow down their offensive while our units are fighting far more energetically and continue to inflict heavy losses on the enemy

But by this time a grave threat had developed due west of Moscow Here three German field armies and the 3rd and 4th Panzer Corps were advancing and the fascists had already reached

the Vyazma area and managed to encircle large troop concentrations of the Western and Reserve Fronts General Hoepner s 4th Panzer Corps was advancing in Gzhatsk-Borodino direction A new defence line was hastily organised–the Mozhaisk line, which was to be defended by our 5th Army reinforced with reserves hurried from the east Lelyushenko was placed in command of this Army, and immediately left his troops near Orel, handing them over to his deputy Kurkin Soon after, Katukov s Brigade was also to be transferred to the threatened sector

The Brigade moved to its new positions under its own steam, without using rail transport The cunning Colonel decided that this would be safer since troop trains made an easy target for German bombers The Supreme C-in-C himself decided how the Brigade was to be transferred On October 16, a critical day in the defence of Moscow Stalin telephoned Katukov and suggested he transfer his Brigade by troop train, but Katukov convinced him that it would be better to take the tanks to Moscow by road Stalin agreed to this proposal, and the Brigade reached its new positions to the west of Moscow swiftly and without losses

Now the Brigade was in Chismena, on the left flank of Rokossovsky s 16th Army It was straddling the Volokolamsk Highway, where there was the greatest danger of a German drive towards Moscow

SKIRMANOVO

Colonel Katukov was unequalled in his ability to keep a military secret and was strict in seeing to it that his subordinates did likewise He thus knew perfectly well what he was doing when he casually remarked, as if *en passant*, as we took leave of him in Chismena Pop over and and see us in a week's time I think that by then the German command will have thought something up Or perhaps we shall '

In actual fact, this 'something' had already been decided, and was to take place not in a week s time, but just two days later, on November 12th We never suspected for a moment that while the men were spending their free time reminiscing about Orel, the Brigade s HQ staff were working hard planning a new operation which was to be launched in the direction of the small, modest village of Skirmanovo to the left of the Volokolamsk Highway It was hard to imagine that such a calm commander apparently free from all urgent business, was longing to get rid of his guests so that he could set out to reconnoitre the field of the coming battle

Meanwhile, the newspaper world received one piece of good news after another about the Tank Brigade We had no sooner burst into the freezing corridor of the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* editorial offices dimly lit by black-out lights hoping to amaze our friends with the most interesting news from Katukov than we were met by a chorus of voices

'Have you heard? Katukov s Brigade has been made a Guards Brigade, and Katukov has been promoted to Major-General!

Boris Burkov our editor, handed me a few sheets from the teletype, which bore the latest TASS communique and said

'It s for their part in the battle near Orel Prepare a column on the tank Guards

So our trip turned out to have been most worthwhile we had some good first-hand information But before we had time to finish preparing the article our correspondent Bashkirov informed us with a note of mystery in his voice from the 16th Army HQ that something interesting was brewing in the Volokolamsk Highway area What exactly it was he couldn t say but it was expected to be interesting Moreover, the 4th Tank Brigade that is the 1st Tank Guards were going to take part We ought to go there immediately

To cut a long story short, on November 13 early in the morning off we set once more Our inexhaustible young driver, a jolly Byelorussian named Misha Sidorchuk was soon whizzing us along the already familiar road in his white-washed car at the breakneck speed only he was capable of

The operation at Skirmanovo village was not a decisive battle of course, but it was nevertheless extremely important In the war there were many instances of a battle for some small village that you d hardly find on the map or for some nameless hill being fiercer than many a battle for a large town The well-known artillery Marshal V P Kazakov Hero of the Soviet Union was to stress the importance of this operation in his memoirs published in 1962 At the time of the battle he was Artillery Commander of the 16th Army fighting on the Volokolamsk Highway It was only a matter of a few vital miles to Moscow he wrote The enemy was already approaching the district centre of Novo-Petrovskoye (where the 16th Army HQ was situated–*Yu Zh*) and had occupied Skirmanovo Our Army Commander decided to organise a strong counter-attack to knock the enemy out of the village

Skirmanovo had fallen to the 10th Panzer Division The German Command considered it particularly important that the village should be held in view of the imminent offensive on Moscow which

was to begin any day then from there it would be possible to strike a serious blow at the 16th Army, especially as Skirmanovo was not far from the Volokolamsk Highway, a vital supply artery for our army

In order to give a full picture of that battle I quote my notes made on the spot on that memorable day

FROM A BATTLEFIELD NOTEBOOK

November 13 1941 Travelling to see Katukov s Tank Brigade again (now the First Tank Guards!) We found they were no longer in Chismena The Brigade was fighting for Skirmanovo, a village where the Germans had made a springboard for an attack on our flank at Novo-Petrovskoye Returned to Novo-Petrovskoye, to the 16th Army HQ We were lucky the artillery commander General Kazakov and Brigade Commissar Lobachov, member of the Military Council were setting out for Skirmanovo Our car (I was accompanied by our photographer Fishman) and another car with Izvestia war correspondents followed along behind their MK

From Novo-Petrovskoye we turned left towards Novo-Rozhdestveno The village had been severely damaged by artillery fire–the roofs had been blown off many of the houses, the church was a wreck and telegraph wires were dangling from the posts A wrecked tractor that had run into a mine stood by the roadside Another tractor down the road was pulling an enormous German howitzer A yellow sign had been painted on the barrel–the outlines of two KV tanks We stopped to take a closer look

General Kazakov was pleased Katukov s men had captured a valuable prize The nazis were using these howitzers against our heavy tanks since all the ordinary anti-tank guns proved ineffective against their strong armour We could hear the rumble of artillery Kazakov had the cars take cover behind a mound and set off to see his artillery units, while Lobachov chatted with the political instructors and we raced off to find Katukov

As usual we found the 1st Guards HQ in the most unexpected place–in a well-camouflaged dugout by the forest A Messerschmitt was flying at tree-top level trying to locate the HQ, but without success Meanwhile the commanders were calmly directing operations It was quiet in the trench just the low murmur of soft, business-like talk

Katukov came out to see us for a minute He was as cool and unperturbed as ever Only there were dark circles under his eyes

from forty-eight hours without sleep He wore a simple army greatcoat with two stars drawn on the lapels in indelible pencil Katukov was no stickler for outward effect This was war not a parade

Artillery was pounding away beyond the forest Dozens of mortar shells were exploding at once with a deafening whistle and roar Black dust was settling on the snow-clad fir trees The field telephones were ringing non-stop Kulvinsky, the Chief of Staff was hurriedly mapping out a new plan of attack

Congratulations General

Thank you But let s agree to make today s conversation a short one Let s go over there, under that fir, so as not to disturb the Chief of Staff

The cannonade increased in intensity The General looked at his watch

'Our motorised infantry are about to launch an attack on Kozlovo This is the situation Reconnaissance reports have shown that the Germans are preparing a new major offensive on Moscow They have chosen the village of Skirmanovo one of their many strongholds as a springboard Army HQ has ordered us to forestall the enemy and attack first, in order to foil his plans for an offensive in this sector of the front Last night in a combined operation with other units, we succeeded in driving the enemy out of Skirmanovo The Germans left behind dozens of crippled tanks several guns and tractors and large quantities of arms and ammo Now the battle for Kozlovo is on and is developing well

Katukov was wanted on the phone He excused himself and said goodbye

In Skirmanovo he added, you ll find it interesting

On our way to the village we saw burnt-out tanks both German and Soviet, wrecked lorries and motorcycles a fierce battle had been raging here only the day before Beyond a small rise lay what remained of Skirmanovo It was a grim sight there were dozens of gutted tanks, with blown-off turrets and battered bodies, and corpses–corpses everywhere There was one soldier who had been burnt to death, lying with one arm raised Several lying in green battle-dress, with and without helmets Their faces preserved by the frost were fresh and rosy Frozen pools of crimson blood on the snow Blood on the tracks of the tanks

Burnt-out houses were still smouldering A lone cow was wandering about–the only living creature in the village In one house that was still standing everything was upside down A wrecked chest of drawers A new sewing machine lying amid the debris on the floor

Blood-stained German boots A torn copy of Kerzhentsev s ABC of Leninism some summaries in tactics, dating back to 1935 and various brochures lay scattered about The remains of shattered crockery on the shelves The saints of the icons in the corner surveyed this scene of destruction with sublime indifference On the walls–photographs of the former owners of the house, in traditional stiff poses before the camera an old farmer a young Red Army officer, a girl wearing a Komsomol badge several children

From Skirmanovo there was a good view of the surrounding countryside Down below, blue columns of smoke were rising above the burning village–Kozlovo which Katukov s motorised units were now storming Over to the left by the forest lay Agafidovo

Our troops were already getting busy with the battle trophies A rich collection of prizes dozens of tanks, guns and mortars, lots of ammunition Gun emplacements had been made under some of the crippled tanks to fight our tanks The cellars of some of the houses had also been turned into pillboxes, and the village cemetery presented a strong fortified area It had taken a heavy toll of our advancing tanks

Noticing the activity in the village the Germans began to pound Skirmanovo The shells fell too close for comfort We took cover Hard lumps of frozen snow beat painfully against our shoulders A splinter rent our driver s overcoat and scratched his revolver holster Then things quietened down again

The commander of the 16th Army, Rokossovsky himself, arrived tall and well-built, wearing a General s dress greatcoat, his boots shining At that moment, from behind us our rocket launchers opened up, and caused havoc among the Germans running from Kozlovo–as we heard from a regimental commander a youthful captain with a helmet over his fur hat who came running up to report

Katukov came striding up, saluted and reported that the Brigade had taken Skirmanovo and was now fighting for Kozlovo

Such was the situation in that sector of the front on that memorable frosty and sunny November day We took our leave of the commanders, hurrying off on their business, and walked through Skirmanovo trying to find our friends of the Tank Brigade–we just couldn t wait to hear the details of the assault on the important nazi springboard

We stopped at one of the captured German dugouts The photographers attention was arrested by a fascinating still life study by the entrance to the filthy lair lay some gnawed pig s trotters, an icon decorated with naive paper roses, carried off,

goodness knows why, from some farmer s house, a German helmet with a stolen headscarf such as are worn by our old women sewn onto it, and several machine-gun belts I took a look inside the 'den The floor was scattered with straw in which only the day before its previous occupants had warmed themselves

Watch out you ll catch lice '

The calm voice seemed vaguely familiar I turned round Why yes, it was Senior Lieutenant Burda! There were the familiar forbidding outlines of his tanks which we had seen at Chismena Now they were under cover, their long necks turned towards the village of Kozlovo, which lay straggling in a hollow, where dozens of shells were bursting–the fierce fighting raged on

Some of the Guardsmen were missing The brave scout Korovyansky had been wounded Burda s friend and rival Zaskalko had been taken to hospital, suffering from burns Senior Sergeant Misha Matrosov, who had been decorated, had died bravely in action Several others had also been killed The price of victory had been high Yet compared to the enemy losses the Guards had suffered slight casualties

Sitting on the earth mound made around a house that had by some miracle survived the holocaust, we talked with the tankmen about the events of the night before Their accounts were desultory and rather piecemeal the men were still too much under the impression of their recent experiences But these impressions were all the more valuable for being frank and genuine

"Remember how the swine held on to the cemetery? And Yevtushenko–there s a comedian if ever there was one! A fascist corporal was on the run and he hops out of his tank, collars him and pulls him inside the tank And Zaskalko–he really made it hot for them! Twelve of their guns firing at his KV, and he doesn t bat an eyelid, just ploughs through them as if they re so much offal Pays not a damned bit of notice to their shells Knows they haven t a chance in hell of getting through his armour-plating Hey, Samokhin? Go on, tell em Kostya, how you chucked those grenades at them from the hatch!

Lieutenant Samokhin now commands the 2nd Tank Battalion War, alas, claims its victims and the commanders are frequently changing The first commander of the 2nd Tank Battalion, Raftopulo is in hospital, and his successor, Lieutenant Vorobyov was killed not long ago in a fierce battle near Kalistovo, when Katukov's men came to the assistance of Panfilov s infantrymen in repulsing a German tank attack on their positions Now Konstantin Samokhin had replaced him

He s a remarkable fellow, Katukov had said of him three days before in Chismena He ll do great things yet Know how Samokhin came to be a tankman? Used to be a pilot In the grim days of the autumn retreat he lost his plane and joined the armoured corps He liked it and stayed with us He s a Stalingrad man, a bold Cossack A very keen dancer, organises amateur shows They say he was a keen footballer once a centre forward And now he scores goals against the fascists with armour-piercing shells

We hadn t met Samokhin in Chismena, and I now took a good look at this swarthy young officer in battle-dress, tough and at the same time very light and extremely agile He smiled, a somewhat embarrassed smile and said

'Well, it was breaking all the rules in the manuals, of course But I ran out of shells and spotted the fascists, all snug in their dugout So I just leaned out of the hatch and pitched some grenades at them '

ON THE DOORSTEP OF OUR HOME

Now I ll tell you about the toughest and most dramatic events the Tank Guards lived through in the Battle of Moscow About the last battles they fought there, on the very doorstep of Moscow in the days of the Germans general offensive, which Hitler had advertised in advance as the last, decisive battle in the East

The Muscovites remember well the anxiety of the last days of November 1941 They remember the screech of German bombs and the clearly audible rumble of distant artillery, the steady tramp of unit after unit marching off to the front, the arrogant German propaganda leaflets promising the imminent destruction of the Soviet capital The nazi generals wasted no time informing Hitler that they could already "look at Moscow through a pair of good field-glasses

In those days the pulse of front-line activity quickened The blue arrows on the HQ strategic maps lay across those villages in Moscow s countryside we all know so well and which only in May had been crowded with Muscovite holiday-makers What stubborn determination, what powers of endurance the defenders of Moscow were to show in those critical days, fighting on the very doorstep of our home

While the assault on Skirmanovo and Kozlovo was on, General Katukov s thoughts were constantly on Chismena Transferring the Brigade from the Volokolamsk Highway to this area was really a

very risky manoeuvre, for all its being vitally essential It was really rather like taking a strong lock off one door of a house, a door that was very inviting for uninvited guests and putting it on another door let s say the yard door

Realising that the Germans had already been finishing their preparations for a new major offensive which might start any day Katukov was extremely worried And he heaved a great sigh of relief when immediately after his armoured battalion had driven the Germans out of Kozlovo he received orders to return to Chismena This manoeuvre was accomplished with the same lightning speed as the preceding one Kozlovo was liberated on the evening of November 14 and the same night the infantry relieved the 1st Tank Guards, which by the next morning were already back occupying their former positions near Chismena

Less than twenty-four hours later the German artillery spoke forth in its rheumy bass along the whole front, and Hitler s grey-green-clad troops frozen stiff from their long lie in the Russian snow hurled themselves into the attack Before the offensive was launched the Fuhrer s orders were read to the troops Considering the gravity of imminent events and particularly the winter and supply difficulties, I order the immediate capture of Moscow whatever the cost

Events moved swiftly and threateningly It took strong nerves not to panic in those critical days Fifty-one German divisions were advancing on Moscow Our troops fought with unparalleled courage yet they were gradually being pushed back step by step losing ground but gaining time the time necessary to gather new shock forces to hold the enemy and drive him back

On November 26, a particularly cold day, our boisterous front correspondent Fishman burst into the office strung from head to foot with trophy arms and cameras Shaking the snow from the collar of his fur jacket he announced somewhat mysteriously

Just back from Istra The Germans have forced the river and captured the monastery Then drawing a new parabellum from his bosom, added Fantastic! Got this from Lavrinenko

Flabbergasted by the news that the Germans were in Istra we plied him for details, but Fishman merely sighed and went off to develop a film A photograph he showed us an hour later showed Istra in flames In the middle of the square amid the smoke and flames, stood a familiar tank and beside it our old friend Lieutenant Dmitry Lavrinenko Having recovered from his wounds received at Skirmanovo he had returned to his unit and immediately found himself in the thick of it

That morning the Germans occupied half the town of Istra, the other half remaining in our hands Lieutenant Lavrinenko was covering one of the major roads with his tank In literally two minutes he told our correspondent what had happened, posed before the camera and then thrust the trophy pistol into his hands and said

Here s a souvenir for you It may come in useful It s still warm Then he exclaimed What are you standing there for you ape! Can t you see I ve got fighting to do

With that Lavrinenko climbed into his tank slammed the hatch to and the machine rolled noisily off into the fray

So off I went, Fishman concluded in a rather wounded tone And a good thing I did too, cos shells started falling right there

Fishman ran about a quarter of a mile to where he had left his car just outside of town Everything was burning and exploding all around Behind him large walls of smoke arose the oil tanks had caught fire

The very next day the battle front moved even closer to Moscow and we met our old friends not far from the city boundaries The roar of gun-fire was quite audible in our cold smoke-filled offices in Pravda Street The tankmen were still cheerful, although their faces were haggard for they had been fighting without rest for days on end–and the way they had been fighting!

Some day people will write books about this war Commissar Boiko mused And what books they ll be! Then they ll write about how we abandoned Chismena We held on as long as was humanly possible, almost got ourselves encircled A report came through from our right flank The Germans have penetrated three kilometres into our rear! Katukov answered Stand to the death! Then came a report from our left flank They re enveloping us! Don t let the fascists through! was the reply Yeremin phoned from his tank regiment The Germans are on my telephone line Hang on! And hang on we did until a message arrived from HQ with the order to retreat '

I remembered the quiet village where the hospitable tankmen had received us only two weeks before the smoke curling up from the chimneys the kiddies with their sledges and the silence the strange uncanny front-line silence We had seen a thing or two at the front and now we knew only too well what such villages are reduced to after the tide of war has swept through them

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* Happily this gloomy presentiment turned out to be wrong by a miracle Chismena survived A year later Commissar Boiko confided to me a moving

This time I only caught a brief glimpse of the General He had grown thinner and more stooped He was suffering from an attack of his chronic illness and it was only by a colossal effort of will-power that he managed to preserve his usual imperturbable and slightly ironic tone

Now we re neighbours, he said with a sad smile But I promise you, we won t be imposing on you for long The time will come when you ll have to chase after us again!

I still have a crumpled piece of paper with pencil-written notes on it as a souvenir of that meeting It is a rough copy of some dispatch the head of the political department handed me Now it can be published as a record of those times

"On November 18, the German 5th, 6th, 11th and 35th Divisions launched a decisive offensive along the whole sector of the front The 1st Tank Guards were given the task of defending the Pokrovskoye-Yazvishche-Gryadi-Chismena area and support infantry and cavalry units The Germans launched their offensive from four sides–the south, the south-east the west and the north Thanks to overwhelming numerical superiority and geographical advantages the German attacks were successful Despite heroic resistance, the Germans succeeded in breaching our defences The Guardsmen bore themselves in a manner worthy of their high title, preferring to die where they stood rather than yield an inch Six crews died

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story very typical of the Tank Guards Before the withdrawal from Chismena they received orders to evacuate the inhabitants and set fire to the village Yeremin was entrusted with seeing that the order was carried out After the withdrawal he was asked Have you burnt it? The whole village is burning he replied And the regimental Commissar backed him up with lowered eyes Chismena s burnt down Katukov said nothing When two weeks later the Brigade broke into Chismena again sweeping the Germans out the village stood undamaged The inhabitants gave their liberators and old friends a tumultuous welcome They had launched a swift attack from three sides simultaneously so that the hitlerites would not have a chance to set fire to the village for they would certainly not have spared it

My it was quite something! Commissar Boiko said The firing was still going on yet the whole village had poured out into the streets shouting weeping and laughing they surrounded our tanks some bringing bread some milk The men opened the hatches and shouted Out of the way! We ve got to fight! But it wasn t a bit of use And then the men infected by the general rejoicing began singing and firing salutes

Only the commander and the commissar were rather worried that day They were afraid some formalist from up above might call them to task for failure to obey the order that had been given at the time of the withdrawal They had their answer ready in advance We knew we d be back and back soon But it was alright nothing was said

bravely in battle, providing cover for the regrouping infantry The Guards anti-aircraft battalion countered the German attacks from land and air, covering the village of Chismena with a solid curtain-wall of fire At the same time two medium and three small tanks boldly counter-attacked the superior enemy forces Two attacks, from the west and the north, were repulsed But then, attacking from the rear, the Germans managed to break through to the southern approaches to Chismena The Brigade had only one withdrawal route–along forest paths to the north-east and east '

Yes, the General s foresight in taking advantage of lulls in the fighting to give maximum attention to reconnaissance of the area was now to prove invaluable Any unit finding itself cut off on all sides, and facing four enemy divisions, would be in mortal danger had its officers not made a detailed study in advance of all the paths and tracks in the area

The Germans did their utmost to finish off the Guards Brigade that had caused them so much trouble with one fell blow They thought that Katukov s hour had struck air raids, combined simultaneous assaults from several directions enormous numerical superiority–what more was needed to destroy a single tank brigade?

But it was not enough to destroy the 1st Tank Guards They fought stubbornly for every inch of ground, for every position that had been prepared in advance for all-round defence And only when the retreating units had been regrouped did the 16th Army HQ order the Brigade to make an orderly withdrawal The infantry left first the tankmen were the last to go

The report, brief and to the point, ran as follows

The withdrawal from Shebalkovo was carried out in good order, the troops retreating in small groups along various forest paths They regrouped here on the night of November 18-19

Battalion Commissar Melnik told me the details of what was concealed behind the lines of his laconic report I could well imagine the familiar towering forest, the narrow paths buried deep in snow and the tired men in their dark-blue battle-dress trailing along behind their few grumbling tanks The tanks skidded in the soft slushy snow The thick blanket of snow hid patches of muddy ground, and brown patches of mires blocked their way They had to find detours, tow out tanks that had got bogged down, beat off attacks of enemy submachine-gunners, and plod on and on in order to arrive in good time at the place where the infantry were awaiting their support And they mustn t abandon a single tank in that

dead, rotten kingdom nor a single tractor or truck, for every one of them played a decisive role in the outcome of a battle in those difficult days

General Katukov was with one of the groups He walked along thin and pale but as braced and composed as ever He could have driven on ahead of the men but he preferred to go on foot for he knew that no order can have such a strong effect on the soldiers as the personal example of their commander The men saw that the General was walking with them and it greatly boosted their morale

Men were cutting down the ancient fir trees and laying them across the unfrozen water-holes, making a passage for the transport and helping the tractors tow the guns Every step forward was a feat Yet all the groups reached the assembly point on time and without a single shell or a single supply box being left behind on the way

They had no time to take a breather Katukov s tanks immediately set off to take up their new positions prepared to defend them at any cost

Those were the hardest and gravest days of all when the hitlerites persistently and methodically, oblivious of their tremendous losses were driving two steel spearheads into our defence lines, one to the south, the other to the north of Moscow In the south they were already crashing towards Kashira and in the north they had reached Yakhroma and Dmitrov and were attempting to cross the Moscow-Volga Canal

The tank units were back fighting in the same place again in the Istra area They were exhausted from the ferocious fighting against such heavy odds but every man realised that there was nowhere to retreat behind the Istra district lay Tushino which was virtually a suburb of Moscow Not a step back behind us is Moscow said the Order to the armies of the Western Front that was read to the troops on November 22 And Katukov s men just like Panfilov s infantry and Dovator s cavalry who fought side by side with them all the time, put up a truly desperate struggle

There were heavy frosts, and steel literally burnt at every touch, but the men never left their tanks mounting one counter-attack after another Several villages changed hands time and time again

Katukov paid close attention to the enemy s morale As an old soldier he realised perfectly well that if the Soviet troops were being sorely tried in those terrible days, the enemy was taking it ten times worse We re fighting on the doorstep of our capital, ' he told his staff "We re fighting with our back to our own walls, while they ve landed up thousands of miles from home They re

in a foreign land, deadly hostile to them, suffering from counter-attacks of unprecedented ferocity exhaustion after all the battles, bad supplies due to extended communications partisans in the rear and lastly these unexpected frosts for which they were totally unprepared No whatever you say their much-vaunted endurance is going to crack any time now Moreover, the General knew what others could only guess at in the extremely grave situation of the German advance the Soviet Supreme Command had with tremendous patience been secretly preparing and concentrating near Moscow new reserve armies, which were about to turn the tables completely and pave the way for the defeat of the fascist armies which had already been seriously weakened on the approaches to Moscow

Perhaps this was why despite the fact that he was almost dropping from exhaustion, the General looked in unusually good spirits This was why he so eagerly snatched up any report from the battalions that might give some hint of the general mood of the German soldiers

We had very small forces Katukov later told me 'Two weeks of uninterrupted defensive battles had taken their toll But I sensed —or rather felt with all my being like a physical sensation—that things were not much better for the hitlerites You know what our men are saying these days? The fascist is not what he used to be He s limp and out of sorts True, we were still retreating and they were still advancing But one could already sense that something was in the air You know psychology is an important factor in war You ve just got to take it into account in whatever plans you make Well the Commissar and I noticed a very curious thing It was at Nadovrazhye if I remember rightly

And the General started on a detailed account of that operation, which was one of his favourites

A few days before the Red Army offensive began, at the very beginning of December, the General was informed about a most extraordinary incident three tanks of the Guards Brigade counter-attacking in the Bakeyevo area had not come up against the fierce resistance they were used to The Germans, as soon as they saw the three tanks, turned tail and retreated, and what is more, retreated in panic, leaving all their equipment behind them

The General went on to say

'We were most intrigued by this highly unusual incident I remember the Commissar and I talked the whole matter over wondering what it could mean At first we thought that there must be some cowardly rabble in this sector newly arrived at the front—

the Germans were running short of reserves and were throwing in draft reinforcements, like straw into the furnace We made inquiries and discovered that the units facing us were the same which had hitherto attacked us so strongly and fiercely So there were just two possibilities either this was a trick designed to mislead us, display of feigned weakness with the aim of luring our tanks into a trap, or the morale of the troops exhausted from the long bloody struggle, had really cracked

A thorough study of the matter showed that there could be no question of a trick the Germans had suffered heavy losses without gaining any tactical advantages So it appeared that the colossal strain and over-taxing of all physical and moral strength were really beginning to tell on the German soldiers Thus clearly the time was now ripe for energetic offensive operations Katukov nevertheless decided to put his ideas to the test just one more time and deliver a really hard blow to some German unit and see what happened

The Tank Brigade were at the time deployed in separate groups along an eleven-mile sector of the front, covering the army s flank Nevertheless Katukov decided to take a risk He withdrew eight tanks from the front and concentrated them in a single armoured fist to strike the German rear near the village of Nadovrazhye The operation was entrusted to Lieutenant Samokhin, that bold soldier who had pitched hand-grenades into the German dugouts from the hatch of his tank at Skirmanovo

Great pains were taken over planning the operation The scouts found secret forest paths The mechanics got the tanks ready The tank crews carefully studied the combat area on maps and planned their manoeuvre The General and his chief of staff gave them a thorough briefing Then one dark winter night the eight tanks disappeared in the forest heading furtively for Nadovrazhye, a strongpoint in the German defences It so happened that a German troop column had just stopped there–about ten tanks some forty lorries, a sizable body of infantry and a motorcycle detachment Samokhin's tanks spurted forward and bore down on the village firing from all their tank s weapons It is difficult to describe the chaos that ensued "A fire in the tavern with music and dancing Samokhin put it, when he described the operation to me in January in the Leichtweis Cave, in the village of Ivanovskoye near Volokolamsk His lads drove through the streets of Nadovrazhye and back again, leaving a shambles in their wake It s enough for the tracks of a heavy tank to run over a lorry to crush it, let alone its contents, as flat as a pancake

After crippling three German tanks, destroying forty lorries, fifty motorcycles and about a company of infantry, Samokhin s tanks raced out of the village as fast as they had come With this the incident might have ended, had not Samokhin noticed two columns of enemy tanks emerging from the forest, hastening towards the scene of the shooting One of the columns was approaching the village from one side, the other from the other Their crews had no idea what had happened in the village

And here, old Samokhin showed them what real military cunning is, General Katukov would say with a light smile 'A most artistic manoeuvre!

Katukov never tired of recounting the story of this manoeuvre He was delighted to feel that his pupils had not only learned how to use their machines but were skilled tacticians as well And Samokhin really had pulled out a most artistic manoeuvre Advancing under cover of the trees, he opened fire first on one enemy column, then on the other Having completely bewildered the fascist drivers, he finally brought them to grips with one another–each of the two columns taking the other for the enemy

There they are pounding the hell out of one another, and Samokhin giving them a bit more for good measure, first one column then the other!

All eight tanks returned undamaged

The General was delighted with the results of the operation Now he was finally convinced that the German offensive drive was petering out For a start, they had failed to put up much resistance and had responded weakly when attacked, whereas hitherto they had met such bold assaults with energetic counter-measures Secondly they had lost their heads, which had never happened before Thirdly, the commanders of the two columns had failed to grasp the situation and unable to locate the enemy, had attacked one another in other words they were suffering from severe overstrain

Now Katukov waited calmly and full of confidence for the order to begin the offensive He was sure of the success, although even now it was clear that the fascists would put up fierce, furious resistance, such as is born of despair Our armies would have to think up some new tactics to suit the new situation If earlier, during the retreat, Katukov had earned the reputation of being a careful, extremely cautious commander, who always worked out and weighed up the pros and cons of an operation over and over again before throwing in even a single tank from his reserves, he now warned the men that each crew would be given an active combat task in the very first attack While hitherto Katukov s tanks had principally

fought from ambush singly or in small groups now he was planning a mass armoured strike

Remember that from now on we shall act boldly he told the men Boldness, swiftness and if you like cheek–that s what we need today

The order to go over to the offensive was not long in coming And soon Katukov s tank units reinforced as they went were counter-attacking together with the rest of the 16th Army Their goal was Volokolamsk And it was the 1st Tank Guards who were the first to break into the streets of the old Russian town liberating it from the nazis

FAREWELL MOSCOW BERLIN HERE WE COME!

Now we return to where we began our story shortly before the assault on Ludina Gora we were listening to General Katukov addressing the Guardsmen in the Leichtweis Cave–the cellar of the shell-wrecked agricultural college in the village of Ivanovskoye A new fierce battle was just about to begin The date–January 10 1942

While the General was addressing the new-arrivals, I was running over in my mind again my former meetings with the Tank Guards, beginning with that memorable day when I first met them in Chismena So much had happened in the intervening months much snow had fallen in the Moscow area and we had travelled many a long road

Many of the men I had got to know had fallen in battle The tank units have a particularly hard time of it they re always the first under fire, and however strong their armoured plating it can never be completely invulnerable Lavrinenko is no longer with us nor is Matrosov, nor is Molchanov We shall lose many more men yet–one can never tell in war whom a shell or bullet will miss and whom it will hit

I wasn t to know then that only a few days later that virtuoso tankman Kostya Samokhin was to be killed in the fighting for the villages of Arzhanniki and Pustoi Vtornik, that some six months later Lyubushkin and Kapotov were to fall near Yelets, that Alexander Burda was to die a hero s death in the fierce fighting in the Ukraine, that many, many more were to sacrifice their lives in order that the Tank Brigade could push forward towards Berlin But even then, huddled together a mere eighty miles from Moscow,

in the dirty, smoky cellar of that old Russian building damaged by German shells, Katukov and his comrades were firmly convinced that the 1st Tank Guards would reach Berlin, whatever the sacrifices however long the road

The smoke-blackened paraffin lamp flickered and shadows danced on the wall At the end of his talk with the newly-arrived officers the General said

It only remains for me to tell you a little about myself After all, you need to know the man who ll be commanding you I come from a peasant family in Kolomna District Moscow Region, about sixty miles from Moscow In my childhood I worked as a day-labourer Then there was the Revolution and the Civil War I ve been in the Red Army since 1919 I started off in the ranks and fought at Tsaritsyn, Voronezh and near Warsaw Fought against the white bandits in the Gomel area Then I took up an officer s course Worked myself up from assistant company commander to company commander, battalion commander and so on up to division commander Studied at the Military College, then at the academy of mechanisation and motorisation I joined the Party in 1932 Have been fighting since the 22nd of June Have seen a lot and sometimes it was pretty hard I can tell you But then war is never an easy profession I think you ll get used to it just as I did

Pushing back the cape that was serving as a door, a man in a sheepskin coat came into the room

Permission to speak, General An urgent message from Army HQ

Katukov nodded towards the signals officer and rose Let s finish on that then The chief of staff will inform each of you of your appointments and then make haste and join your regiments They need you there I wish you all the very best of luck, Comrade officers!

The General opened the package and got down to reading the orders We mounted the frozen steps together with the officers and went out into the yard The rumble of the artillery had intensified considerably The sky was aglow with purple flashes Light blue star rockets rose high into the air Tracer bullets were streaking across the sky quivering like moths

The usual grim landscape of war! Except that if anything there were more corpses here than usual A battle of exceptional ferocity was being fought for this hillock The Germans were entrenched in that brick building over there and our men just across the way Only forty yards or so separated them The Germans would have

given anything to hold on to this bank but it was no good And now they were to roll back further and further westwards their defence line had been smashed right through in depth

I heard a light crunching of snow and turning saw the General buttoning his coat as he went walking along with someone in a sheepskin coat and upbraiding him

And just how did you manage to go and get it stuck in a ditch? General Suvorov led an army across the Alps can we really have become so weak? Do you know how powerful its engine is?

I realised Katukov was referring to a heavy tank that had got stuck in a snow-drift and slid into a ditch the night before He had already expressed his disgust over the incident for to Katukov every single tank was immeasurably precious The embarrassed officer muttered something in reply

You see! Do you realise what that means! Katukov exclaimed Why, when I was serving in Vitebsk before the war there was a large knitted garments factory there All its motors put together were less than half as powerful as your tank Do you realise what you ve done? You ve gone and got two and a half factories stuck in a ditch!

The officer again tried to make excuses but Katukov was not prepared to listen and cut him short

See that it s back on its tracks by morning d you hear? he said drily Dismissed

I caught up with the General He was heading for the church where field furnaces were burning For three days and nights the mechanics had been working round the clock repairing damaged tanks New tracks were being fitted to one another was having its engine repaired and a third was being refitted

Katukov looked the tanks over studiously offering advice and spurring the men on, asking what they needed to speed up their work He was clearly satisfied with what he saw by morning all the tanks he needed would be ready for action once more Only when he had satisfied himself on this score did he leave the tanks He wiped his hands, and we set off back to the Leichtweis Cave together When we came to the road we had to pause for a moment powerful tractors were rumbling along its icy surface pulling monstrous guns in their wake

The GHQ artillery reserve Katukov said contentedly Marvellous musicians! The concert ll soon be starting You ll be able to hear it

He looked pensively at the sky, rent by rockets and lit up with a purple glow

And along the road past headquarters the columns of huge guns rumbled on Ski troops swished by in their white capes, columns of infantry marched past in warm fur hats and smart felt boots and cavalry galloped by Ludina Gora ought to be liberated in a very short time now, and then there would be further battles in the direction of Gzhatsk

The grim fighting went on

POSTSCRIPT

In six months of incessant fighting up to and including April 1942, the 1st Guards Tank Brigade destroyed 302 German tanks, 165 guns, many machine-guns and large quantities of other military equipment, capturing 176 tanks, 146 guns, 145 machine-guns, 783 lorries and further large quantities of equipment German losses in killed, wounded and prisoners totalled 10 000 officers and men

Although suffering considerable losses, the Brigade maintained its fighting efficiency and subsequently fought on in the 1st Tank Corps commanded by Major-General Katukov, and with Boiko as Commissar

POST-POSTSCRIPT

As a punishment for the failure of the Moscow offensive Hitler relieved Field-Marshal von Bock of his command of Army Group Centre, and sacked Field-Marshal von Brauchitsch, C-in-C of the Wehrmacht, General Guderian, commander of the 2nd Panzer Army and many other generals This is what General Blumentritt wrote in his memoirs of what the Battle of Moscow meant "The turning-point in the East had been reached our hopes of knocking Russia out of the war in 1941 had been dashed

TO THE READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications

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